

**Intergenerational Learning and the Role of Elders in Integrated Education Systems:  
Constraints and opportunities for Elder support within the integrated education system  
and community of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Dawson City, Yukon**

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## **Foreword**

The Plan of Study that this research paper is based upon is concerned with how the continued research surrounding integration of Indigenous Knowledge and western science will benefit education. The research contributing to this growing body of literature is produced by both indigenous peoples as well as non-indigenous scholars. Scholars advocate for place based holistic education, as it allows for the connection of learning and living and recognizes place as a site of natural and cultural history. Many believe that education should reproduce what is living in a community and redefine paradigms on the good life in search for sustainability and grass roots pedagogy that involves the people of the community in educational initiatives is beneficial for cultural continuity and intergenerational learning. Involving First Nation community Elders in formal education is a culturally appropriate way to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge as Elders are the holders of Indigenous Knowledge and have long term experience and accumulated knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation about a specific place and culture. Formal education provides a setting for that type of learning to continue to take place for generations to come, improving intergenerational relationships and benefitting education for all. The integration of Indigenous and western knowledge systems can improve our understanding of learning as it is produced, transmitted and, reproduced in many different cultural contexts... as well as contribute to the further conceptualization, critique, and development of Indigenous knowledge systems in their own right, drawing on experiences from Indigenous people from around the world.

## **Abstract**

Education is a tool used to infuse knowledge into the fresh impressionable minds of our present and future citizens. The western imperial approach that has dominated academia is being critically examined for improvement in the face of increasing environmental crisis (Beckford *et al.*, 2010) and decolonization efforts. To continue to adopt the dominant western standards will continue to reproduce the failures of hegemonic colonial ideologies (Aikenhead, 1997; Reid, Teamey, Dillon, 2002:7; Berkes, 1993; Berkes, 2012). Education in the past has been produced, presented and practiced from a euro-centric perspective, and the perspectives of our Indigenous peoples have been perceived as inferior and illegitimate knowledge (Beckford *et al.*, 2010; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Indigenous knowledge research is recognized nationally and internationally as being an important part of preserving cultural diversity as well as providing important insight into relations such as biology, ecology, resource management, conservation education, development planning, environmental assessment, environmental stewardship, and educational innovation (Berkes, 1993; Berkes, 2012; Battiste, 2002). Knowledge accumulated through long-term inhabitation of a place, such as the knowledge held by Indigenous elders, provides a body of knowledge that can be useful in enriching the education of all children (Barnhardt, 2005). This paper is concerned with intergenerational learning and the role of Elders in integrated education systems. Elder incorporation in school contributes to the maintenance and continuation of intergenerational learning and the resurgence and revitalization of Yukon First Nation culture. Community Elders are what bring Indigenous Knowledge into formal education alongside Euro western theories and practice. This research paper examines what constraints and opportunities are present among First Nations and the school system in this specific community, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in of Dawson City.

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## **Acknowledgements**

In 2008, the Yukon Education Advisory Committee proposed several goals and priorities for education in the Yukon. Central priorities included the development of curriculum and resources that integrate into curricula, First Nations content, perspectives, values, knowledge and ways of teaching and learning. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage department in collaboration with Yukon Education included the priority of increasing Elder incorporation in the education system. Elder incorporation in the school system is an important part of integrating Traditional First Nation knowledge into the mainstream education system, as Elders are the holders of traditional knowledge and this knowledge traditionally was passed down through generations from Elder to youth. Elder incorporation in school contributes to the maintenance and continuation of intergenerational learning and the resurgence and revitalization of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture.

Thank you to Janet McDonald with the First Nation Program and Partnerships Centre of the Yukon Government for recognizing the connection between my research and the priorities of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government and Education Department in Dawson City. Thanks to Ashley Doiron of the Yukon Education Department, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage, and Jody Beaumont of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department for collaborating with me on this paper and project. Special thank you to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community members for welcoming me into their community and working with me towards a common goal of preserving local culture through education and intergenerational relationships.

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## **Personal Prologue**

Personal prologue in Indigenous research serves as “a function of narrative writing that signifies a prelude. It encompasses essential information for the reader to make sense of the story to follow and signals that throughout writing, there will be a story” (Kovach, 2009, p.3). Wilson (2008, p.6) explains that prologue “helps provide context and builds relationship between readers, storyteller, and ideas”. It provides an opportunity for an “explanation of the writers background, which is a requirement of the indigenous axiology and methodology of relational accountability” (p.10).

In following these researchers use of prologue, I would like to provide opportunity for readers to understand my background, journey, and motives. I am a white European woman-mother-activist that believes in social justice and self-governance, as well as free inclusive education for all children in Canada. Following Ray Barnhardt I do not believe that one way of life should have to die for another to live and that integrated inclusive education and knowledge practices can improve education for Indigenous students as well as be important and beneficial in improving lifelong environmental knowledge and stewardship in our future citizens. As Nelson Mandela says “Education is the most powerful tool we can use to change the world”. Similar to Kovach (2009, p.7) “I situate myself- not as a knowledge keeper- but would like to act as facilitator to help create entry points for Indigenous knowledge to come through”.

So what brought me to this point in my research journey? I cannot pin point one exact starting point; I believe that I have always had some connection to Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. I was an inquisitive child with a keen interest in dream catchers and what they

represented and for whom; I was fascinated with other cultures and religion and the different worldviews people held and the stories that explained them. I do not know where this curiosity came from and have struggled as an adult with whether or not wanting to know more about Indigenous cultures was appropriate being a non-indigenous person. Recently I was talking with a First Nations woman regarding this, and she told me to listen to signs, maybe I had always had a connection, who knows why or what I was before... that is, if I believe in "past life". Conversations like this make me feel content with my research journey and that my journey can involve Indigenous knowledge and worldviews while being non-indigenous.

After having children and a self-employed business career, I decided at 27 years old that I would fulfill my dream of going to university. I always believed that education was the best way to make a difference in future generations and bring about change; so I attended Laurentian University and enrolled in an introduction to Anthropology course and after the first class I sat in my car and realized that this was the stuff I was passionate about. I could learn about different cultures and different worldviews. I was hooked, and promptly made anthropology my major. My parents kept asking what I was going to do with an Anthropology major and what job I would get with that. I didn't have an answer yet, but I believed that as long as I continued to do what I was passionate about, my journey would lead me to the right place. So I began my undergrad in Anthropology, which provided me with tremendous opportunities and life experiences. It was my field experience in Costa Rica for an Environmental Anthropology class that triggered my love for the environment and the impacts that people have on it and vice versa. Experiential learning was my favorite way to learn and the field was my new classroom.

I was introduced to the Environmental Studies program at York University and was immediately intrigued by the interdisciplinary framework. I applied for the masters in

environmental studies with interest in topics such as pollution, environment, food, health, and anthropogenic impacts. While awaiting my acceptance I was presented with the opportunity to go on a science expedition to Alaska with a professor of mine. She had a great environmental science curriculum planned out and thought that it may serve me well to get some more experience before entering into an environmental masters. I also figured that it could be a good opportunity to conduct some research in the field and have a jump-start in building relationships prior to my masters beginning. So I quickly had to come up with a research question, interview questions, and informed consent documents in order to do research involving human participants. I promptly jumped through the hoops of the institution in order to be able to collect usable data while in the field, despite the whole process feeling very backwards to me. I felt as though I was putting the cart before the horse. How could I come up with a research question and proposal without knowing anything about the community or what they want first? As Castledon, Morgan, & Lamb (2012, p.168) explain, “there’s this kind of constant catch-22 where you need to have ethics approval to go and work with communities, but you can’t really develop the proposal or get the ethics unless you actually go and talk to them first”. This is a dilemma that would prove to be problematic over and over. This form of research practice in the past, as Castledon *et al.* (2012, p.161) explains, has created “parachute researchers who collect data at a time of their choosing and exit as quickly as they appear with little to no communication before, during, or after the study”. The benefits of the “academy’s research enterprise for indigenous individuals and communities have not been equally or equitably distributed” (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; in Castledon *et al.* 2012). With a new focus on the need to address the continuation of colonialism, Smith’s seminal work challenged researchers to change their approach when conducting research with Indigenous peoples, focusing on collaborative research

and “community based participatory research as a research philosophy and methodology that has the potential to contribute to efforts to decolonize the university researcher-Indigenous community relationship” (Castledon *et al.* 2008; in Castledon *et al.* 2012, p. 162).

I did not have the time to gain ethics approval prior to leaving for Alaska, so decided that I would just do an ‘exploratory inquiry’ while there and see if my thoughts and ideas aligned with the community or contacts I was meeting. One of the first lessons I remember about field work, while in a medical Anthropology class, was that field work rarely goes as planned or follows the timeline you have set out. Turns out, I came home from Alaska having gained knowledge and questions in a different area of interest. The contacts I met with and elders I was privileged to spend time with peaked my interest in the area of Indigenous Knowledge and Integrated Education practices. This way of arriving at a research question made much more sense to me. Relationships should be formed first and the community should help inform the research question that ultimately is going to influence them. “Establishing collaborative research is not simple... but academically, the research results have the potential to be more robust, more detailed, and ultimately more accurate than research conducted in the context of distrust and inequality” (Menzies, 2004).

With these amazing experiences under my belt and a new focus, I began my masters in Environmental Studies, with a focus on Indigenous Knowledge and Environmental Education. Thinking about my meetings regarding Integrated Knowledge and place based learning practices in Alaska with Ray Barnhardt, as well as my time spent with Elder Howard Luke, I began thinking about what integration practices we had in Canada in relation to Indigenous Knowledge and Education. My literature review provided me with much insight into ongoing research in this area and the key authors involved. I took an interest in the Yukon, as some of its First

Nations are similar to those in Alaska, such as the Tlingit. My research journey took me to Whitehorse Yukon, where I engaged in an exploratory inquiry into Yukon Environmental Education and Indigenous Knowledge Integration Practices. This time I did not produce a research question, or interview questions for the Human Participants Research Proposal. Following the words of Fred Metallic, (Skype, 2014) “Learn to listen to what communities are saying...relationships are at the centre”. I introduced my proposal as an inquiry; to participate, learn, listen, and observe the communities integrated education programs and curriculum, and planned on meeting and starting the beginning stages of relationship building with members of the community in order to work towards a collaborative research framework that could inform major research in the future based on community wants and needs. I aim for my work to be guided by First nations communities and be useful to them.

The relationships I formed in Whitehorse with the First Nations Programs and Partnerships Centre and First Nations community members provided me the opportunity to do my major research in Dawson City Yukon, in a collaborative research process with the Yukon Education Department and the Heritage Department of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation Government, focusing on Intergenerational Learning and the Role of Elders in Integrated Education Systems specific to the Dawson City community and Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation.

Through this research journey, I have built a relationship with my research topic, the people who have inspired and assisted me along the way, and the territorial lands that these relationships play out. It is important that my research “reflects a holistic, value-based knowledge system that consistently returns to the responsibilities of maintaining good relations” (Kovach, 2009, p.63). Relationships, as Wilson (2008) explains, are formed through the process of finding out information, and the way that research is carried out and used should be respectful

and help build on those relationships. To maintain these relations throughout my research journey, is to maintain relational accountability throughout the entire research process, including formulating a research question, collection of data, analysis of data, translation of data, writing, and editing.

## **Introduction**

This paper is concerned with intergenerational learning and the role of Elders in integrated education systems. This research was conducted in the community of Dawson City, Yukon Territory. Dawson City has the second highest population in the Yukon with 1,319 (2011 census) and growth remains relatively the same aside from the population increase in the summer due to tourism and seasonal work. 30% of the population identifies as Aboriginal, 12.5% identify as French Canadian, and 36% as European with just over half of the non-immigrant population being born outside the Territory. The Robert Service School in Dawson City has an enrolment of approximately 150 students ranging from grades kindergarten to grade twelve (Yukon Community Profiles). The school supplies students with a collaborative learning environment where the School and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Education seek for their students the best possible education experience incorporating traditional First Nation knowledge and culture. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation is governed by an elected chief and four counsellors, as well as an Elders Council made up of citizens 55 years of age or older. The General Assembly—all voting-age citizens—gathers at least once a year to pass extraordinary resolutions, approve legislation and provide direction to political leaders (First Nation Community Profiles).

The research contributing to this growing body of literature is produced by both indigenous peoples as well as non-indigenous scholars. I understand that as a woman of European ancestry and having a predominantly euro-centric education situates my worldview within a specific epistemological framework, often juxtaposed to that of indigenous epistemologies, and I approach this research subject matter respectfully.

For the purpose of this paper the term “Indigenous” was used when referring to knowledge held by First Nations (FN) as opposed to Traditional Ecological knowledge (TEK), as the word “traditional” is ambiguous as Berkes (2012) explains, and refers to behaviour and practice that has been passed down continuously from a historical place, people, and time. It is often disputed as to how much a behaviour and practice can change over time and it still remain traditional. During a conversation in Yukon, this term was discussed as problematic as its definition does not allow room for innovation of younger generations to contribute to cultural evolution (McDonald, 2015). As Johnson (1992) explains “ it refers to cultural continuity transmitted in the form of social attitudes, beliefs, principles and conventions of behaviour and practice from historical experiences” (p.4). The term “ecological” in most cases describes the knowledge of the land and the method by which it was gathered and transmitted, which some argue is a western framework. I have used the term “Indigenous” as to not reduce the useful knowledge First peoples hold to its ecological aspects, and to describe the broad knowledge held by First peoples of the land, in which “traditional ecological knowledge” fits into. The term “Indigenous knowledge” (IK) will be utilized to describe the totality of first peoples world views, encompassing the accumulation and transmission methods of their knowledge, the TEK of the land, and the socio-cultural perspectives in which it was produced. The term Indigenous knowledge encompasses the epistemological views of the nation’s First Peoples, and for the

purpose of this paper, its implications for the transmission of indigenous knowledge and integrated education, both formal and informal.

Western Eurocentric ways of knowing are commonly considered to be open, separating mind and matter, quantitative, systematic, objective, reductionist, rational, and intelligent (Agrawal, 1995; Beckford, 2010; Berkes, 1993). Western scientific knowledge tests hypotheses through abstract and empirical methods and analytical representations of the world. It provides general explanations of phenomena for utilitarian purposes, and is perceived to hold high prestige among the public (Agrawal, 1995).

In contrast to Western science, Indigenous knowledge, as defined by Warren et al. (1995) is the “local knowledge held by indigenous peoples or local knowledge unique to a given culture or society” (p. 9). Indigenous ways of knowing are imbedded in culture, community, and spirituality, and make no separation between nature and culture (Berkes, 2012; Ellen et al, 2000; Nadasdy, 1999). The IK that indigenous peoples hold about their land is almost completely opposite of that of western science. IK is considered mainly qualitative in nature, intuitive, holistic, moral, spiritual, and is based on empirical observations and facts formulated through trial and error, and based on local information acquired over long periods of time (Berkes, 1993; Ellen et al, 2000). It is a non-technical accumulation of complex information directly concerned with the lives of people and their interactions with the natural world, formulated from indigenous wisdom, ideas, and perceptions (Agrawal, 1995). IK is an “integrated system of knowledge” (Berkes, 1993:5; Ellen et al, 2000) that is intrinsically connected to the socio-cultural dimensions in which it is constructed; it is difficult to understand when separated from its cultural context (Agrawal, 1995; Ellen et al, 2000; Nadasdy, 1999). Berkes (1993) explains that Indigenous knowledge holds “symbolic meaning through oral history... a distinct world view, and relations

based on reciprocity and obligations towards both community members and other beings” (p.5).

As Nadasdy (2004) quotes a Kluane First Nations response when asked what traditional knowledge is, “Well, it is not really ‘knowledge’ at all; it’s more a way of life”.

Indigenous knowledge research is recognized as being an important part of preserving cultural diversity as well as providing important insight into relations such as biology, ecology, resource management, conservation education, development planning, environmental assessment, education, and environmental stewardship (Berkes, 1993; Berkes, 2012; Nadasdy, 1999).

Focusing on the similarities between Indigenous knowledge and western knowledge “rather than on their differences may be a more useful place to start when considering how to best introduce educational reform” (Battiste, 2002:11).

Indigenous knowledge is recognized as an epistemology that values environmental stewardship, sustainable behaviour, community relationships, and instills ecological philosophy. Past environmental education has been produced, presented and practiced from a euro-centric perspective, and the perspectives of our Indigenous peoples have been perceived as inferior and illegitimate knowledge (Beckford *et al*, 2010; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002).

Indigenous knowledge research is recognized as being an important part of preserving cultural diversity as well as providing important insight into relations such as biology, ecology, resource management, conservation education, development planning, environmental assessment, education, and environmental stewardship (Aikenhead, 1996; Berkes, 1993; Berkes, 2012; Nadasdy, 1999). Researchers Cajete (1994) and Battiste (2002) are articulate about the uses of Indigenous knowledge in mainstream academia, as it can provide good examples of relationships between humans and the natural environment, and would be useful for all students in

interdisciplinary topics or projects that deal with the relationship between culture, environment, and development.

Battiste (2002) explains that history has provided proof that the “exclusive use of Eurocentric knowledge in education has failed Indigenous students” (p.9) and has also failed the environment. Aikenhead (1996) expands on this by saying that a culturally responsive education practice aimed at sustainable development, environmental responsibility, and cultural survival would benefit all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. That Indigenous knowledge cannot be effectively integrated into the education system unless educators presenting knowledge are made aware of the “interpretative monopoly of Eurocentric education and learn how the fundamental political processes of Canada have been laced with racism...in recognizing this the transdisciplinary quest to balance European and Indigenous ways of knowing can be merged” (Battiste, 2002:10).

Barnhardt & Kawagley (2005) suggest that Indigenous epistemologies and place-based education practices can foster environmental stewardship and enrich the educational experiences for both Indigenous and non-indigenous students, and play an important role in creating an “interdisciplinary pedagogy of place” (p.19). Native people of Alaska have begun reintegrating their Indigenous knowledge systems into their curriculum to better connect what students learn in school with their life outside of school, in hopes to restore a traditional sense of place while still providing deep and broad educational learning for all students native and non-native.

Elders of Alaska, such as well-known Indigenous educational leader Howard Luke (1998), understand the importance of learning “both the white man’s ways and native ways” (p. 89). Howard explains that the local children want to learn their culture, but it is not happening. He emphasizes the importance of schooling to the children, while addressing that they should

learn their culture at the same time along the way. Howard believes that culture should be taught in the schools and in the home as well. He believes that children would benefit from having experiential learning, like that which he received while young, instead of such reliance on the written word and academic textbooks. Battiste (2002) extrapolates, the “first principle of Aboriginal learning is a preference for experiential knowledge. Indigenous pedagogy values a person’s ability to learn independently by observing, listening, and participating with a minimum of intervention or instruction” (p.15). Howard Luke (1998) also believes that English should be taught but native tongue should be taught as well, to help from the disappearance of native languages and cultures and the knowledge that is embedded in them. Indigenous language is the most important factor in the survival of indigenous knowledge, as their symbolism structures knowledge, and these languages are irreplaceable in educational success (Battiste, 2002).

Educators and elders, such as Howard Luke, are concerned about the lack of interest aboriginal youth are paying to their native tongue and knowledge (Battiste, 2002; Luke, 1998). For these reasons, as well as his extensive knowledge of his native land, Howard Luke spends much of his time volunteer teaching at local schools in Fairbanks because he believes that “teaching the younger generations about the culture and survival skills is important because their generation is going to have to go back to this stuff the way we are going” (Luke, 1998: p.90).

Culture based education has been identified by Yukon Territorial Government (YTG) and the Education Act as a foundational element of school development in the Yukon. YTG policy requires Yukon communities to preserve, promote and enhance their culture through arts, heritage, and language. This policy is based upon the idea that culture provides the foundation for learning and growth. Educational experiences should be reflected in management and operations of the school and also in curricula and programs within the school.

In the Yukon Territory there are 14 different First Nations. In Dawson City one is always on the territory of Han or Tr'ondëk Hwëch' in First Nation, formerly the Dawson City Indian Band. The education reform in the Yukon began with the Yukon Brotherhood document "Together Today, for our Children Tomorrow" which was an important document in the Yukon First Nations becoming Self Governing (Bennett, personal communication, February 26, 2015). This important document discussing First Nations wants and needs in regards to things such as cultural identity, community development, education, economic development, research, and a policy statement for the 'Education of Yukon Indians' was delivered to Ottawa in 1973 by the Yukon Chiefs (Johnston, personal communication, March 3, 2015). The Education piece of this document was important in order to work towards bringing back a set of First Nations cultural values that would help the young people understand who they are, and regain their lost pride (Yukon Indian People, 1973). The Yukon Indian People (1973) discuss that the educational system for 'Indians' was designed to assimilate them to become white men through cultural replacement. For 'Indian' education to be successful, they believed the best thing was to attend public schools in order to develop the skills required to be successful in today's world, however, they wanted programs for "the special problems, the preservation of language, and the factual representation of the culture of a group comprising nearly one-third of the Yukon's population" (Yukon Indian People, 1973, p.50). Following the success of the 'Yukon Indian People' in becoming a Self Governing Territory, changes in First Nation education began.

Over the past thirty years the governments of Canada and the Yukon have moved towards developing policies with the Yukon's 12 First Nation groups, called Self-Government Agreements (SGAs), which are unique to the Yukon and "include financial compensation, land, harvesting rights, heritage resources, and operative government structures in areas such as

education and justice” (Lewthwaite, Owen, and Doiron, 2015). The Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in (TH) First Nation established their SGA in 1998 and it has brought about significant change in education providing opportunity for education practices that are responsive to the cultural needs of the First Nation. Specific reference to education is made in section 17.7 of the SGA (Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, 1998, p.33):

In relation to education, upon the request of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in and the Yukon shall during the term of a self-government financial transfer agreement, negotiate the division and sharing of responsibility for the design, delivery, and administration of programs delivered within the Traditional Territory relating to [amongst other things] kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum.

Although the SGA allows for a self-contained First Nation education system in Dawson, the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in see themselves as part of an integrated community and feel they should have an integrated education system as well. In Dawson, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in and the Yukon Government co-manage the “culture based education which requires activities to create, preserve, promote and enhance TH culture, including arts, heritage, and language” (Lewthwaite & Doiron, 2014, p.65).

Elder incorporation in the school system is an important part of integrating Traditional First Nation knowledge into the mainstream education system, as they are the holders of traditional knowledge and knowledge traditionally was passed down through generations from elder to youth. Elder incorporation in school contributes to the maintenance and continuation of intergenerational learning and the resurgence and revitalization of Yukon First Nation culture.

This research paper examines what constraints and opportunities are present among First Nations and the school system in this specific community, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in of Dawson City that I can examine in order to better incorporate elder presence in the school and continue to improve and sustain intergenerational relationships and the intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge for sustainable education.

### **Methodology**

The integration of Indigenous knowledge and western scientific knowledge has not been smooth despite its good intentions. As Nadasdy (1999) explains, the main objective has been to collect and document Indigenous knowledge in order to integrate it with western scientific knowledge. He argues (p.15) that this integration:

Automatically imposes a culturally specific set of ideas about knowledge on the life experiences of Indigenous people... and TEK research compartmentalizes and distills Indigenous peoples beliefs, values, an experiences according to external criteria of relevance, seriously distorting them in the process... and it takes for granted power relations by assuming that Indigenous knowledge is simply a new form of data".

Research continues to discuss the potential uses of this integration of knowledge systems without offering a method in which it can be done, as current integration is taking Indigenous knowledge and implementing it into management frameworks of bureaucracies and being constrained and utilized by western scientists and not by Indigenous communities.

For science to incorporate Indigenous knowledge, the care, control, and direction needs to incorporate Indigenous peoples. Only when this respect, and understanding of Indigenous

peoples rights is recognized can the benefits of Indigenous knowledge be shared and integrated (Wavey, 1993; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

To overcome the historical power imbalance between Indigenous communities and the western institutions that have impacted their lives and the environment they are so closely intertwined, a collaboration of research initiatives informed and directed by Indigenous communities is necessary (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Linda Smith's seminal work challenged researchers to change their approach when conducting research with Indigenous peoples, focusing on collaborative research and "community based participatory research (CBPR) as a research philosophy and methodology that has the potential to contribute to efforts to decolonize the university researcher-Indigenous community relationship" (Castledon *et al.* 2008; in Castledon *et al.* 2012, p. 162).

Castledon *et al.* (2012) explain that CBPR is a process "by which decision-making power and ownership is shared between the researcher and the community involved... co-learning is promoted and new knowledge is co-created and disseminated in a manner that is mutually beneficial" (p.162). This process emphasizes community values throughout all stages of research and focuses on the inequalities that are evidenced in the structures of power that are so very common between academic researchers and the communities they work with. The building of meaningful relationships between researcher and community needs to "take precedence over the egoism of the researcher" (Menzies, 2004, P.17).

Critical Indigenous scholarship and CBPR is important as it engages with the political reality and colonial context in which research is carried out. It allows for researchers to learn from Indigenous wisdom and better understand the political/colonial context that plays out on Indigenous territory. Castledon *et al.* (2012) explain that CBPR can move towards relationships

built on trust, the challenging of western research paradigms, making space for Indigenous peoples and communities to decide the level of involvement they want to participate in research processes, and can help develop stronger future ethical research guidelines.

Research regarding Indigenous knowledge integration in education works towards the resurgence of Indigenous ways of life, cultural values, and language; as well as legitimizes Indigenous ways of knowing and allows for the transmission of this knowledge to future generations. Without a community involved research process and maintaining the respect, reciprocity, and responsibility to relationships, “one side of the relationship may gain power and substance at the expense of the other” and further perpetuates colonialism (Wilson, 2008, p. 79). To work towards healthy relationships and decolonization, community based participatory research is important as it allows for decision-making power and ownership to be shared between both the researcher and the community and creates knowledge that is mutually beneficial.

Drawing from my rich background in anthropology and my experiences with Environmental Anthropology in Costa Rica (i.e. Canadian Organization for Tropical Education and Rainforest Conservation), an exploratory inquiry in Alaska on culturally responsive curriculum in the North, and First Nations knowledge integration in education in Whitehorse, Yukon, I carried out my community based research that consisted of appreciative inquiry (participatory action research), naturalistic inquiry (studying people in their own environments), interviewing of key informants, as well as a literature review of Indigenous knowledge and its implications for education, and literature review on the topic of intergeneration learning and the role of Elders in education, for the purpose of understanding current integration practices being employed in education and work towards implementation of Elder presence in First Nation integrated education, specifically in the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in community of Dawson City, and for

the continued improvement and development of future cross-cultural sustainability education and the rehabilitation and decolonization of First Nation communities and culture.

This topic and paper was the result of community based participatory research and collaborative research with the Yukon education department and the Heritage department of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation. Key informants were Jody Beaumont, Ashley Doiron, and Debbie Nagano. The research question and the topic of this paper arose from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community of Dawson City, and the First Nations Programs and Partnerships Centre of the Department of Education, Yukon. The Preliminary research I carried out in Whitehorse, Yukon, February to March 2015, which looked broadly at integrated education methods within public school systems provided the opportunity to investigate how schools were bringing First Nation content into everyday teaching and learning at schools as well as begin building relationships with First Nations communities in Yukon. Throughout this research it was clear that bringing First Nation Elders into the school and classrooms was a common way to incorporate First Nation knowledge and tradition into formal education.

When it came time for Major research topics to be considered, I was in contact with my key informant Janet McDonald, from the First Nations Programs and Partnerships Centre in Whitehorse about possible projects I could collaborate with for my Masters research. There were no projects taking place in Whitehorse that directly connected with my topic of interest but Janet was aware of integrated education work taking place in Dawson City Yukon and put me in touch with key informants Jody Beaumont and Ashley Doiron. Talking with Jody and Ashley via teleconference we discussed integration methods at the Robert Service School in Dawson and what could be done to make them better. The topic of having a stronger Elder presence in the school to improve relationships between youth and Elders as well as better incorporate local First

Nation knowledge was something that Jody and Ashley had been discussing and trying to focus on. Having so much other responsibilities on their plate this project was being overlooked and not given priority. With my experience and knowledge in Integrated education and Indigenous Knowledge I mentioned that this could work really well as my research topic as First Nation Elders are the community members who hold Indigenous knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation and are a successful tool among integration methods in Alaska and Whitehorse. Jody and Ashley discussed that there are many constraints and opportunities present in the community of Dawson that affect whether or not an Elder is involved with education of youth and they have been wanting to identify these and work towards having an Elder Resource Book available to the community to help understand and better incorporate community Elders with education and local youth.

The population of interest for this research paper was the community of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation and Dawson City, Yukon, Y0B 1G0. Contact was made with the key informants Jody Beaumont and Ashley Doiron through my relationship with Janet McDonald at the First Nations Programs and Partnership Centre of Yukon Government who recognized the connection between my research interests and the integrated education priorities of this community. Participants outside the key informants were selected based upon the introduction of myself (primary investigator) by key informants. In order to build relationships with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community and Elders and understand community dynamics and culture, it was important for me to be present and involved in the community during my major research. I stayed at a bed and breakfast in Dawson City while I was in the field from January 8, 2016 to March 22, 2016 collecting data through Community Based Participatory Research, literature

review, Observations, Unstructured interviews, participation, storytelling, document analysis. The storytelling and unstructured interview method made more sense when working with First nation Elders, felt more like the way I build relationships in my everyday life, and fits in well with academic research. Data was collected via written notes and voice recording which was then transcribed into notes on my computer. The community of Dawson and specifically the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community were welcoming to myself and research topic, and I am grateful to have been able to be part of this community and build meaningful relationships with not only the Elders, but also the community as a whole.

Indigenous methodologies allowed me to adhere to relational accountability. As Wilson (2008, p. 77) states, "Respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology". I have a responsibility to ensure that the people I work with are not harmed in any way through my research and that I maintain ongoing relationships with the community I engage with. "My life is an influence on every life mine touches. Whether I realize it or not, I am responsible and accountable for that influence" (Ron Barton, 1998).

## **Discussion**

### **Community and place-based education**

"Place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit" Greenwood (2015, p.3). Why is some knowledge legitimized in education over others? If a topic is not CORE to curriculum... what are we saying by leaving it out? Does current education reinforce perceptions on what is considered legitimate ways of knowing or what is legitimate

knowledge? Having children in a classroom with no windows and concrete walls and not outside in nature could give the perception that what is important is inside the room and in order to learn you must be in here. I thought about my experiences in the Yukon and how different their education model is compared to here. Place-based, experiential learning is considered critical to the well being of their students and their First Nations culture. I think about what our education says about our culture.

Activities, such as field experiences within the education system, can provide outdoor and experiential learning opportunities that Greenwood (2002) describes as slow pedagogy that allows learners to get into the wilderness and experience a place, as opposed to passing by a place or learning about a place from inside a classroom or a book which is typical of the western education system. Experiential learning also allows for rebuilding relationships with nature, as the body can suffer from the oppression of nature. Theoretical learning is not the only way to gain knowledge, as Rasmussen & Akulukjuk (2009) discuss, learning through action and experience is a beneficial practice of knowledge production.

The classroom setting and traditional Eurocentric education practices, as Greenwood (2002) discusses, have legitimized certain ways of knowing and silenced many other voices through bureaucracy. He advocates place-based holistic education, as it allows for the connection of learning and living and recognizes place as a site of natural and cultural history. Greenwood as well as Giroux (2004), Beckford *et al.* (2010), Rasmussen & Akulukjuk (2009), and Maina (1997) believe that education should reproduce what is living in a community and redefine paradigms on the good life. Kahn (2008) exemplifies this with his advocacy for grass roots pedagogy that involves the people of the community in educational initiatives. With the immersion of learners in a capitalist, economic, development driven society, is it possible for

children to imagine a different way of life? Can they imagine ways of living that will meet their needs of the present without diminishing the ability of future generations to meet their needs?

The media continuously tells them what they should want and value and what a good life should look like, which ultimately perpetuates consumerism.

The incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in environmental education is an increasingly popular practice. Indigenous knowledge was not considered a valued form of knowledge production and historically indigenous peoples were, and are still, part of the silenced voices in society. Beckford, Williams, and Nahdee (2010) explain that the environmental philosophy of Indigenous peoples as one that emphasizes a co-existence between nature and all inhabitants, with a commitment to preservation and the responsible use of resources, is a philosophy that could be a profound lesson for students in mainstream classrooms about the critical issue of lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, and environmental care and respect. Children would also benefit from exposure to ways of thinking about human and environmental interactions that cultivate a habit of mind whereby respect and care for the environment is seen as moral obligations.

Researchers Barnhardt & Kawagley (2005) discuss that linking education and the physical and cultural environment in which people and schools inhabit are important, especially in Indigenous communities where generations of people have acquired knowledge and relationships with the land that can enrich the learning experience for all students.

Educational curriculums and programming create the futures we want them to see, and currently that future looks like a reproduction of our past, and to continue to adopt the dominant western standards will continue to reproduce the failures of hegemonic colonial ideologies (Aikenhead, 1997).

## **Intergenerational learning and the role of elders**

Schools are institutions where intergenerational learning takes place. Our education system, however, focuses on bringing youth together in masses to learn from adults who tell them what they should learn. Loewen (1996) says that the school opportunities for intergenerational learning should be about bringing both the young and old together for opportunities for each to learn from one another. He compares industrialized society to that of non-industrial society and explains that elder knowledge in a non-industrial society is valued greatly due to the fact that the knowledge elders possess about their land and survival has much in common with younger generations lives. In industrialized society, rapid technological advances make elder knowledge more and more irrelevant to the younger generations lives, and contributes to widening the generation gap. When it comes to First Nations communities, the knowledge held by elders and the transmission of that knowledge is how their culture remains strong throughout the years. Ernest Boyer (cited in Loewen, 1996) states, “The health of any culture depends on the vital interactions among at least three generations”.

Learning in a formal education school model is much different than learning outside of school. While in school, students are judged individually on tasks that are set out by the institution or teacher; these tasks often do not reflect the real world that many students live in. Without incorporation of adults that reflect this ‘real world’ “we may continue preparing students for a world that is nothing like the one they face upon graduation” (Loewen, 1996; p.24). By bringing together multiple generation’s to learn from one another, experiences can be shared that illustrate the ‘real world’ past and present. Having Elders present in schools is not only beneficial to First Nation communities or First Nation students, it is important for all youth and Elders themselves, as it improves and maintains intergenerational relationships within a

community. Intergeneration learning is important in adolescent development, as Loewen (1996; p.37-38) illustrates:

IDENTITY, ADULT ROLE, EXPLORATION:

- What social institutions present for adolescent involvement will be part of their identity, integrated into development
- Guided exposure to adulthood
- Observe actions and habits of real adults
- Observe models of adults worthy of emulation
- The more diversity of models the more possibilities, connections, potential available for adolescent
- Diversity of models grounded in common values of care for adolescent development = community support for development
- Support and interdependence is constantly observable

RELATIONSHIPS, RESILIENCY:

- Brings relevance to any study
- Mutual respect strengthens relationship (uncommon between adult and adolescent)
- Equal teaching and learning responsibilities become possible
- Develops "friendship skills"
- Adaptive and integrative skills learned and developed through observation and experience
- Strengthens self concept as more varied and numerous social interactions
- Empathizing spurs intellectual growth and visa versa
- Socially shared experiences with adults

## COMPETENCY:

- Talents identified and acknowledgments by adults
- Competencies established beyond transient and superficial demands of adolescent peer pressure
- Guided journey from novice to master by way of bench marks and rites of passage
- Feedback and recognition offered in life stage just when it is needed (the 'need' to feel good at something)
- Opportunity to demonstrate relevant skills and be recognized by adults in the real world

## AUTONOMY AND INTERDEPENDENCE:

- Presents more realistic image of the way people work together
- Shared social systems used to accomplish goals
- Success dependent on the meshing of mental and physical efforts of individuals
- Interdependence and reliance on others demonstrated and experienced
- Presents many observable models of "autonomous and interdependent adults "

The education system in Canada has access to “living educational treasures” (Battiste, 2002; p.21) through elders and First Nation members who are proficient in Indigenous knowledge and language. First Nation Elders with their traditions and experiences are pertinent vehicles for the transmission of knowledge along with themes of First Nation worldview and identity (Croke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000). These treasures are important resources for education and the progress and happiness of First Nation students as well as the revitalization of First Nation culture because elder teachings are “culturally relevant and meaningful to the lives

of First Nations students and communities...they value student life experience and provide meaningful education” (Crooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000; p.5).

Having elders in a classroom also rebuilds the connection between generations that many people feel is lost. Elders also benefit from being involved in education. Jordan Lewis (2015) explains that it instills a “sense of pride and purpose among Elders, as well as a heightened awareness of traditional knowledge and Elders’ roles in education”.

Traditionally in Yukon Athapaskan culture, a young girl’s maternal aunt and young boy’s maternal uncle would be responsible for educating them alongside grandparents who also acted as teachers and authority figures. Children learned through observation and experimentation, which was perpetuated by the child’s curiosity. Stories and songs played an important role in learning and also provided the basis for discipline, and knowledge (Council For Yukon Indians, 1987).

Storytelling and dancing are important forms of learning and passing down of knowledge within FN communities. Learning relied on the memories and stories of ancestors and oral tradition was the form of transmission of this knowledge from generation to generation. It provides opportunity to impart wisdom from person to person, and generation to generation. All cultures thrive from communication and an understanding of the past. “Shėhondėk”- means Tell me a story in Hän language. Cora Weber Pillwax (cited in Battiste, 2002 p.25) talks about story:

Stories may be for and about teaching, entertainment, praying, personal expression, history and power. They are to be listened to, remembered, thought about, and mediated on. Stories are not frivolous or meaningless, a story is not told without intent or purpose. A person’s word is bound up closely with the story that he or she tells. A person’s word belongs to that person, and in some instances

can be viewed as being that person, so words- in particular some words in some context- are not carelessly spoken. These are the old ways, and they are still practiced and observed today by many people in many places.

Percy Henry of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in FN in Dawson City (personal communication, Feb. 8, 2016) explained a bit about him telling stories at the school and culture camps, "I don't read a book to tell story, I did it myself so I know what I'm talking about". A poster in the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Cultural Centre captured more of Percy's thoughts on story (Percy Henry, 1994, retrieved in 2016):

Some of the stories I tell may be hundred year old, but it passed on to Elder, so he heard it when he was kid. And he told it when he got old, so that kid heard. When he got old he pass it on. So, that is how the Indian story go. The Indian story is something never been written on a paper or nothing. It's just a memory.

Years ago, the exchange of story between generations was different than it is today. Elder roles have changed more recently with a money-centered economy. Youth used to spend time with elders and help them with chores in exchange for stories (J. Beaumont, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2016).

Learning through watching, storytelling, and experience was the form of traditional education for First Nations. Percy Henry talked about learning to trap with his dad; "He didn't really show me how to set trap, I watched him, so I learn" (Percy Henry, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2016). Being outside and experiencing the land is the best way you can learn about the land. When asked how he gained knowledge about the land he said "I did it, I seen it, I walked it!" (P.Henry, personal communication, Mar. 8, 2016).

Elder Angie Joseph-Rear (personal communication, Feb. 4, 2016) talks about growing up at the traditional land of Moosehide, located up the river from Dawson City

We spent time with elders, helped them collect water and cut wood, we learned to respect them and they would tell us stories and give us treats and bannock. We learned how to do a lot from going out on the land with elders and mimicking them. Everything was taught by parents or elders in the village...Today is so different, with this quickly evolving world families need to be involved and encouraging their youth to attend camps and traditional activities. We always encourage young people and we ask parents to come too, but they never do.

Traditions survive in oral or written form when they are passed down from one generation to another, and onwards through history (Wayne Horowitz, *Myth and Medium Pamphlet*, 2016). Through their wisdom and years of lifelong experience, the Elders are the main source of oral history and stories, and they provide knowledge and an identity for FN communities in a relevant way while contributing lessons about life and living traditionally (Maina, 1997).

### **What is an Elder in the TH community?**

“In the context of First Nation communities, the term "Elder" can have many meanings. Most commonly, it simply refers to an older person. It can also mean someone who has been sought by their peers for spiritual and cultural leadership and who has knowledge of some aspect of tradition” (Stiegelbauer, 1996, p.39). In most societies, the term elder refers to someone who has reached a specific age, and is commonly interchanged with the term ‘senior citizen’. As an elder, many experiences have occurred throughout the years, and these experiences are learned from and shared with younger generations. “Being a role model for the path of life is an

important part of being an Elder...aside from the issue of age, a person becomes an "Elder" in the "eyes of the community" (Stiegelbauer, 1996, p. 43). There is a societal dictation of what an elder is, and generally that is just becoming 55-60 years of age (A. Doiron, Mar.1, personal communication, 2016). "Everyone can be an elder through age, but not everyone can be a 'true Elder'" (A. Joseph-Rear, personal communication, Feb.4, 2016). A "True Elder" in the TH community (Accumulated through Interviews with community members, 2016) is someone who:

- Holds traditional knowledge and willing to share it freely
- Has connections to others in community and land
- Is a wise person
- Has life experience that they have learned from and are willing to admit and share
- Holds knowledge in culture
- Has respect for others and the land
- Is spiritual
- Has leadership skills
- Is willing to teach, but also willing to learn
- Has a positive attitude

"Elders provide opportunity for cultural teaching, native language, a holistic view, teaching through storytelling, respect, and just having them present provides opportunity for intergenerational learning and relationship building with youth" (K. Nagano, 2016).

### **Historical Impacts on the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in of Dawson**

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, or Han people were impacted tremendously by historical events that they could not control. These events were the cause of the slow, unregulated altering of their society, with their traditions, morals, and behaviours changing over time; known as cultural drift.

- **Fur trade-** 1847- First recorded encounter of the Han with the Hudson's Bay Company Traders. The sale of Alaska to the United States opened up many more trading posts on Han territory. With this came many new items for the Han. Han were now connected to the world economy that they could not control (Mishler, 2004).
- **Missionaries-**1850s- protestant missionaries encountered by Han sought to deliberately and fundamentally change Han culture. Teaching them Christian ways at mission schools and forcing them to turn away from their own culture (Mishler, 2004).
- **Disease-** 1900s-smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria  
Trade networks and the influx of people from the gold rush acted, as conduits for contagious infectious disease that the Han were not accustomed to. Disease killed the young, the old, and entire families. The loss of elders disrupted the transmission of cultural knowledge and language to younger generations (Mishler, 2004).
- **Gold rush-**1886 brought new people to Han territory. In 1896 with the discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek, began a defining event in Han history, the Klondike Stampede, forever changing the economy and society of the Han people. Prospectors overran the area and displaced the Han from Tr'ochek to Moosehide while Dawson City took shape; home to 20,000-30,000 people at the height of the stampede. Now a minority, the Han had to compete for vital resources as they lost hunting and fishing grounds and non-natives were over hunting game. Living in a new society the Han were introduced to the

frontier lifestyle of the love for gambling, alcohol, vile language, and the degradation of women (Mishler, 2004).

- **Relocation**-In 1897, Dawson city was established and the Han at Tr'ochek are relocated by missionaries three miles down river to Moosehide. This brought about a completely different way of life for the Han as they were no longer moving around with the changing seasons. This also gave the government the opportunity to begin the assimilation process.
- **Residential schools**- The Mission school at Moosehide closed causing an exodus of families to Dawson. Missionaries believed that removing children from their backward environment and sending them to schools run by the church would allow them to better become useful members of society. Boarding schools were introduced where missionaries could control what children learned. The Carcross residential school opened in 1911 by the Anglican Church was where children were taught to despise their culture and were not allowed to speak their native language. As a result, children returning from residential school did not fit in to their native or non-native society (Mishler, 2004).

Occurring over the short time of 100 years, these events transformed the economy, society, and culture of the Han people and left them with the residue of disease, dependency, and alcoholism (Mishler, 2004). With the ongoing threat to their culture and traditional ways of life, the Han Chief of the time arranged for the Gan Haak, drums, songs, dances and stories to be trusted to the Han people of Eagle Alaska until a time when they had found their power and could once again share them with pride. Dobrowolsky (2003; p.109):

### Beat of the Drum

Raven, you must fly away with our songs, dances, stories, and drums and store them where they can be protected until there comes a time when we can share them with pride and honesty... a time when we have found our power.

Hundreds of years after the battle to save their lands and culture, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in have regained control of their lives and are now a self-governing First Nation. "Today, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in celebrate their heritage as they build for the future" (Dobrowolsky, 2003). The building of their future will encompass their hard work for a culturally responsive education system that benefits all children of the community. The incorporation of elders in the plan for an integrated education system can not only improve the integration methods but also help to regain the intergenerational relationships between youth and elders that have been lost under the circumstances of their history.

### **Vision statement of TH**

Our vision is to achieve an interdependent and united self-governing First Nation by re-establishing our traditional culture and reclaiming our identity and rightful place as Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nations people. By committing to work together to provide training, education, and employment, we will build a strong, healthy, and stable future.

## **Constraints present in this community that interfere with Elder involvement in the school**

The school in Dawson City, which houses all the grades from Kindergarten through to grade twelve, is where the future citizens of Dawson are educated. With forty percent First Nation enrolment, and the SGA policy for integrated, culturally inclusive education, it is top priority for TH citizens to have FN programming and Indigenous knowledge being passed down to future generations. The incorporation of TH Elders within the school in Dawson has been identified by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government, as well as the Yukon Education department, as a beneficial way to incorporate Indigenous knowledge day to day in the school. Despite all the good intentions and work towards involving elders in the classrooms, many elders in the TH community still do not take part. Throughout investigation, by myself the primary researcher, in this topic many constraints as to why Elders are not involved came to light.

First and foremost, the way that children come to learn and know today is much different than in the past, and Eurocentric knowledge and pedagogy are juxtaposed with Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. IK is found in histories, stories, philosophies, and ceremonies. Indigenous pedagogy comes from talking and sharing circles, experiential learning, storytelling, modeling, and often prayer (Battiste, 2002). This way of knowing and learning is much different than the formal education we have today in public schools, with students sitting in desks in a closed in room and a teacher standing in the front of the class spouting out information that students are suppose to remember and be tested on later.

There is a lack of understanding among students of how to learn from Elders because they teach in a different way from formal schoolteachers. All children learn in a different way and their learning styles are influenced by the child rearing practices and culture in their home (Billing, 1995, cited in Battiste, 2002). For many First Nations, learning at home is “grounded in

important cultural values resulting in learning and communication styles that are often in conflict with the values, teaching styles and assessment methods of the classroom” (Maina, 1997).

Elders are familiar with learning through experience in their culture; many growing up on the land and children in the classroom today are familiar with the formal way of learning. As J. Beaumont (Jan.22, 2016) explained during personal conversation,

Children learn by watching and instructing, Elders teach by showing. They don’t stand in front of a class in a classroom and teach about math etc. Many are missing the foundations of who they are, or don’t know what they are suppose to share. For example, Percy only goes to the school with me because he realizes it is important to go but the kids don’t know what to ask and he doesn’t know what to tell them. Elders only know how to teach the way they were taught and students don’t know how to learn that way.

The culture camp coordinator at TH Heritage also spoke about the differences saying that “Elders teach through conversation, story, or doing, whereas kids are familiar with learning in a formal school environment, which adds to the disconnect between them. Kids do not know how to learn from Elders as it is not a familiar way of learning for them” (W. Poll, personal communication, Jan. 12, 2016, interview). Many elders find it difficult to teach in the school. Children find it hard to learn from them but Elders also find it hard to conform to the formal system.

There is a lack of understanding and tolerance for the schools structure on the part of the Elders; many have “no tolerance for aspects of the system. It is foreign to them or often too familiar to residential school format for them to feel comfortable” (A. Doiron, personal communication, Mar, 1 2016, interview). Residential schools had a major impact on Canada’s

First Nations and the effects of this time in history are still with them today affecting how they live out their lives in a culture that they were told to forget about. “Due to affects of residential schools and being told not to express their culture, many elders do not feel confident enough to do activities, ceremonies, or transfer their knowledge to younger generations” (W. Poll, personal communication, Jan. 12, 2016). Elder Angie Joseph-Rear expresses her views on this, “Shaming in our young life has a lot to do with how much elders are involved. Some people say ‘I don’t know this...didn’t learn this’, they don’t want to say ‘I don’t know’” (personal communication, Feb.4, 2016). Often community members or non-FN peoples assume that being a FN Elder means that you hold valuable knowledge about your culture and traditional ways of life and that they should want to share them. “Elders often feel nervous about admitting what they don’t know because they feel they should know the things that people ask them about” (J. Beaumont, Jan.18, 2016). “Some elders don’t know about the bush, they were never in the bush and no one taught them. Many people stayed at camp or worked in town. They lived a different lifestyle and some elders are scared of the bush” (Patty, personal communication, Jan.28, 2016).

Due to residential schools, the different upbringings among the FN Elders, and the loss of many Elders in the community presents a problem in accessing Elders with traditional knowledge that they are willing to share. “Accessing elders who want to speak about culture and their knowledge is tricky and the small community makes it difficult as well. It is usually the same Elders that help out at the school- Percy, Mable, Victor, William, Angie, Julia, after these 5 Elders pass will there be others in line?” (W.Poll, personal communication, Jan.12, 2016). A few elders talked about how they don’t go into the school or attend the camps and will only go sometimes if their grandchildren are involved. They mentioned that nobody calls on them anyway; they use the same elders all they time. The Elders that are called on regularly are ones

that are open to sharing despite the circumstances of their past. It is understandable that Elders would be apprehensive about going into the school or going to camps based on the histories of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, but it is a shame because despite the unsettling past there is so much that could be learned from those histories. Percy Henry (personal communication, Mar.8, 2016) mentions that there are “lots of things to tell, but most Elders, they just die with their good stories”. The community is trying to revitalize their culture and build a healthy bright future for younger generations and the knowledge Elders hold and the relationships that can be formed between generations is a vital part of that plan. Many members of the community try to engage the Elders, they “talk to Elders and ask them to think about what they want to do with the kids at the school or camp and ask Elders to come and they just say ‘no no’” (Patty, personal communication, Jan.28, 2016).

The cultural inclusion at the school is going well and the children attend Hän language classes and participate in traditional activities frequently throughout the year. The depth of traditional knowledge often does not surpass the physical activity itself because there are discrepancies about some of the language and the cultural histories and stories that go along with these activities. “The histories behind activities are important. It explains why they are leaning it. But there are tensions about what the history and foundation is” (D. Nagano, personal communication, Jan.19, 2016). A teacher tried to incorporate drumming into his lesson plan for the students but “there were discrepancies about proper protocol on how to teach drumming, and whether children should be drumming or not. The whole thing got bogged down with the politics and never happened” (C. Betts, personal communication, Mar.2, 2016).

The Department of Education provides funding from government for FN inclusion pieces. Articles 28-30 of the Principals and Guidelines for the Protection of Heritage for

Indigenous Peoples define the role of national legislation and government in regards to financial support as, providing Indigenous communities with financial and institutional support for the control of local education, through community-managed programs, and with use of traditional pedagogy and languages. But funding seems to often be why things get held up in the school system. “The amount of money given to First Nations is determined by how many Status First Nations are in the First Nation. Education is funded through this. Everything comes down to money. We need money directly into FN government to take down education completely without YTG controlling it” (D. Nagano, personal communication, Jan.19, 2016). Out of the funding provided to the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’ in the pay honorariums for the Elder’s come. TH policy does not allow for Elder’s to be paid more than \$30/hour (J Beaumont, personal communication, Jan.22, 2016). These honorariums have often interfered with Elder support in the school because they have to claim their incomes and this income can affect their pensions. There is a lack of understanding on the part of the Elder’s about how financial pensions and honorariums work and affect one another, so to be safe some Elder’s don’t come into the school. “Elder’s look for money now and are in need of money with a money economy and that really interferes. Often they want to be involved more but the money they make interferes with their pensions, and they don’t know what to do” (K. Nagano, personal communication, Mar.7, 2016).

The money-based economy is something new for elders and not the way that they were traditionally recognized for their time and knowledge. The trading of stories and just spending time with them is what Elder’s enjoy. Knowing that their knowledge and experiences can be of help to future generations. The money they get paid for their time and knowledge is accepted and appreciated because they need money to survive but it doesn’t provide them with the same value in their lives. In, *Our Stories about teaching and Learning* (2014, p.34):

You have to be able to give them the time of day because they have contributed to something. It's not just like, "Thanks for your information. Here's your money," or "Here's your gift, and we'll see you later" kind of thing. They remember those moments you have spent time with them, and those are the kind of things that seem to be of value in their lives. And it brings them value because it helps them to build confidence in their ability as an Elder, getting to a point where they are getting some recognition

The pay is welcomed by the Elder's in the community as recognition for their knowledge and time but Elder's can often feel degraded because teachers in the school system make more money for their knowledge. What does that say about which knowledge is valued in the school system?

" Their little pay is not equivalent to teachers, and this pay often interferes with their pensions, so some elders tell others not to go" (D. Nagano, personal communication, Jan.19, 2016).

Elder's telling other Elders not to go to the school is also another common problem within the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community. Some families do not see eye to eye on things and the memories of tough times with each other and lateral violence in their past are still with them, and the feelings are very real. Humiliation and poor treatment towards each other is also a learned behaviour rooted in residential school experience. Being pitted against each other as opposed to working together was what was encouraged. Due to tensions between families in the TH community, many elders do not participate with school activities or culture camps with the youth. There are "problems with elders working positively with each other" (J. Beaumont, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2016). Some elders feel they are not wanted around, or not listened to or respected by the others. At one point they were involved at the school but with

arguing about traditional ways or histories they have stopped. Many traditional activities such as the Han singers have diminished in their numbers due to a lack of cooperation. Some people want to just do the singing and dancing because having that at least is something; but others want it done the way it was traditionally done which involved certain procedures and rules to follow; however, these procedures and rules are not agreed upon by all members. Many people backed out and felt that it shouldn't be done until there is a plan as to why they are doing it, as to not just be participating in activities like "token Indians".

There is a lack of reciprocal respect between Elders in the community but there is also a lack of reciprocal respectful relationships between youth and the Elders. A common concern heard in recent times is that children don't listen to their Elders anymore. This breakdown in traditional system of learning and connecting, especially among First Nations Elders, concerns them and often affects their participation in education. For example, a few elders do not feel appreciated or respected by the youth. During personal conversation (2016) a few Elders said they do not want to return to the school due to a lack of respect from the students (too busy on their phones and not paying attention). Such technological advances make Elder knowledge seem irrelevant to the younger generations lives, and contributes to widening the generation gap. There is not just a lack of respect from the youth of the community towards Elders; there can also be a lack of respect for the youth on part of the elders. As Percy Henry (personal communication, Feb.8, 2016) told me:

I went to a young people meeting and the elder told me "there devil, they don't listen", oh I couldn't believe what I heard! I said I wonder what we were like when we were that age... we are not all perfect. I asked him, do you ever talk to them? Do you talk to these devils? I said, I'm sorry, I talk to school kids and

they listen and they listen good. You have to talk to them but you don't tell them what to do or not to do, you tell them bits and they listen. There were these young girls that wanted me to help them go to chief and council, I did that and they asked the question. They said, "I wish elder would talk to us...see what our future look like, or tell us something". Some of us have kids; we have to tell them what their future is... all that is lost. But nobody talks to the kids; just think they are no good. That's bad, you know, when you call a kid stupid. You call them stupid and that's the way they gonna act. So I told this elder, as long as you call them devil that's how they gonna be, call them no good that's how they gonna be. I don't care what kind of kids and people, you talk nice and treat them good. When you call them no good that's it. So a lot of them (Elders) are like that, they don't talk to young kids.

Many people throughout personal conversation discussed that it is not only the youth that need to make an effort to build relationships with the Elders, the Elders need to show an interest in the youths lives as well. "Elders need to show an interest in youth just like youth need to show an interest in elders; sit with them and listen, spend time together" (Patty; A. Joseph-Rear, personal communication, 2016). Many Elders have not been able to overcome the traumas of their childhoods and over the years have turned to alcohol in place of their culture. "When First Nations lack a sense of belonging and culture they turn to alcohol" (D. Nagano, personal communication, Jan. 26, 2016, Interview). Substance abuse further removes people from their community and culture and they lack interest in revitalization. "Around 1953 people start drinking a lot and gradually families moved into Dawson from Moosehide. Now with alcohol, people have no interest in camp and the youth" (Patty, personal communication, Jan.28, 2016).

Although the time of residential schooling is gone, its negative impacts still remain. As Ball (2004) explains, their entire self-concept, ways of parenting, how to be social and form intergenerational relationships remain tarnished. There is still memory of a time when their culture was made to be something they should be ashamed of, and children were taken forcibly from their parents and everything that was familiar to them. In the, Finding our way home scrapbook p.37, Clarke explains that:

A blanket of shame descended on the survivors and many would not speak of their experiences in residential school. This marks the beginning of the intergenerational affects of residential school. Students who attended were alienated from their families, did not learn basic parenting skills, and lost their language and pride in their culture and heritage.

These experiences still affect how people feel about education, especially since education continues to be an imposing force of the Eurocentric worldview (Crooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000). For the Trondëk Hwëch'in there has been "intense contact with Europeans for a hundred years. Residential schools were a major impact on them, but it is important to note that there were a lot of things happening due to colonialism" (J. Beaumont, personal communication, Jan.22, 2016).

Residential school experiences and corporal punishment are still felt in children today. Many students at the school parent's attended residential school and have a negative outlook on formal education. Many parents do not push their children to attend school and do not see the benefit of it (Doiron, & Lewthwaite, Our Stories about teaching and Learning, 2014).

Due to the long history of European contact “revitalization has been more challenging in Dawson because of such successful assimilation in the past, and a lack of elders” (A. Doiron, personal communication, Mar. 4, 2016).

The successful assimilation of the past has made the revitalization process difficult. Much of the Hän language and culture has been lost. Losing language, as Dobrowolsky (2003) explains, meant losing other elements of culture as well. For example, “children used to cut wood and carry water in exchange for stories. A generation later, children could no longer understand the language of their grandparents... young people moved into Dawson and were drawn to popular culture and it seemed the language and other values of the Han culture might be lost altogether- this did not happen thanks to the elders” (p.112). It is a common occurrence among First Nations communities that people are not familiar with their culture and language, and they do not identify with their Indigenous heritage (Ball, 2004). Elders like Angie Joseph-Rear; quoted in Dobrowolsky (2003), believe that language is an essential component to reclaiming and revitalizing culture. “We tend to overlook the importance of recognizing the cultural part of our language. We need to educate other people that our identity-language-culture is all one. One cannot survive without the other (p. 112)”. In Dawson City, the Hän language of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in is a big part of the cultural inclusion in the school and in the community as well. Students take Hän language classes, the employees of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in government take mandatory Hän language classes, and there are classes available for community members to take as well. Bringing back the Hän language is a step in the right direction for cultural revitalization in this community and Elders have said, “What is important is never just the language alone, but the stories that underlie the words and the place names. Still need to save the endangered language (Dobrowolsky, 2003; p.113)”. Researcher Davis (2009) explains that:

Cultural survival is not about preservation, sequestering indigenous peoples in enclaves like some sort of zoological specimens. Change itself does not destroy a culture. All societies are constantly evolving. Indeed a culture survives when it has enough confidence in its past and enough say in its future to maintain its spirit and essence through all the changes it will inevitably undergo.

The incorporation of Elders in the school in Dawson City has been identified as an important aspect to cultural revitalization and the improvement of the intergenerational relationships in the community as a whole. The teachers that are employed in the Robert Service School in Dawson are important vehicles for this to occur. Many teachers are on board with the involvement of Elders in their classes but are unaware of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in history and the community tensions that sometimes make that difficult. During personal communication, (Jan. 19, 2016) with D. Nagano, she mentioned that she believes:

Teachers should have more than one day of training, they should attend camps, and it should be mandatory for them to know the history of the community.

Teachers get paid extra to work in Northern communities; they should be attending First Nation Potlatches and ceremonies. They should be taught in teachers college how to teach in these communities, how to approach First Nations, and how to become part of the community.

Battiste (2002) explains that teachers within the education system are important role models in transmitting knowledge and with the potential integration of knowledge's, teachers need to adapt their teaching methods to allow for various learning styles and multiple intelligences. Barnhardt & Kawagley (2005) explains that the University of Alaska Fairbanks, in cooperation with the Cultural Heritage and Education Institute of the village of Minto, has been offering an

opportunity for university students, teachers, and others to spend a week undergoing a cultural immersion experience at the Old Minto Cultural Camp with local Athabaskan Elders and their families. This immersion allows for cross-cultural understanding and connection to a place and its people. What is learnt through this experience cannot be understood through a textbook, because it is embedded in the environment and culture in which it was conducted. As Battiste (2002, p. 25) explains:

Preparation for teaching indigenous knowledge and languages is the most pressing issue for teachers. Many administrators assume aboriginal teachers are richly endowed with aboriginal knowledge, language, and relationships, but the reality is that aboriginal teachers feel equally as unprepared as non-aboriginal teachers who are required to build aboriginal content into their classrooms. All teachers have been educated in Eurocentric systems that have dismissed indigenous knowledge and pedagogy.

Relationship building is important among First Nations communities and especially Elders. They want to spend time with people and have their knowledge valued, but the foundation of a strong relationship provides much more value for them. First Nations people as well as First Nations students and non-First Nations students often have difficulty forming relationships with teachers because of the transient nature of Northern living. Many teachers in Northern communities teach there for a short time. Whether it is the increase in pay as well as Northern living allowance, many southern teachers find their way to the North. Due to the secluded lifestyle of living in an isolated community, many teachers leave quickly after their arrival. Maybe only staying a year or two. Students and the community just begin to feel comfortable with a teacher and then they leave and no longer have that relationship to count on. Another

issue is that for many FN peoples relationship building only comes after they feel that you are going to be there and be part of their life for a significant period of time. This can cause FN students and Elders to never form a relationship with any teachers at the school. In order to have an Elder come into the school, there should be some relationship built between the teacher and the Elder. This relationship takes time and a vested interest in one another in order to be successful. A local teacher expresses their feelings in *Our Stories about Teaching and Learning*, (Doiron & Lewthwaite, 2014, p.8):

I know I am a better person because of this experience. You come to a school like this to teach and you want the experience to be different, especially in the classroom. Somewhere along the way I realized that the real (positive) experience here was to be gained by not living my same life here, but instead responding to the opportunities (this school community) offered. It was the same in my classroom. I wanted it to be different, but I had to be the one to respond. I knew the education would be different. It has to be. I wanted it to be more reflective of this school community and the students and their lives. I have made some progress. I challenge myself too, but it needs to be the focus of (the school's teachers) conversations. How can we respond better to what are students are telling us about their schooling and learning? I know we don't ask that enough. If we did, we would be making much more progress.

### **Opportunities present in this community that encourage elder involvement in the school**

Many opportunities are present for elder incorporation in education between the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government, Yukon government, and the Robert Service School in Dawson City.

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in boasts a strong heritage and culture for students as well as the entire community. Gatherings and ceremonies are a vital part of Hän culture, and still are even in today's progressive society. Moosehide Gatherings happen every other year in Dawson City, at the Moosehide First Nation settlement. It is an ongoing tradition that brings together hundreds of people from all over. There are celebrations involving stories, songs, feasting, stick gambling, and dances. Hän Singers and Dancers are committed to learning songs and dances for performing at special events. These types of activities bring the community together and have revived and revitalized the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture in Dawson City. The culture camps including "First Hunt" and "First Fish" or events such as Myth and Medium put on through the Heritage Department are other revived customs that encourage youth to connect with elders, community members, the land, and their heritage. All of these events and activities help to renew Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture and create pride among the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community. There are Elders in the community that are strongly invested in cultural revitalization and the passing down of knowledge to future generations and there are many members of the younger generations excited to learn the ways of an Elder and be able to continue the transmission of knowledge for years after their Elders have passed. The high proportion of young people among First Nations presents many challenges but also some unique opportunities. "A lot of people are growing up and seeing themselves as survivors as opposed to victims. Especially the younger generations, they are feeling strong and filled with pride. I think it would be nice for the older community Elders to come into this time with us, but a lot don't want to be bothered" (Allison, personal communication, Mar. 14, 2016).

The inclusion of community members who may not be an Elder yet but hold traditional knowledge and skills, are important aspects to Indigenous education practices in the Tr'ondëk

Hwëch' in community. "Many of the younger generations are excited about cultural revitalization, and work with Elders and each other for the betterment of the community" (Allison, personal communication, Mar. 14, 2016). K. Nagano (personal communication, Mar. 7, 2016) speaks to this as well:

Many Elders don't see eye to eye. My generation has a good education and is involved in the community and now that is being reflected in the TH government. This makes it easier for the future and collaborating and working together. My family, personal connections, and being raised here by all the elders really helps with my work with the kids.

When asked if he thinks it is important for younger generations to listen to Elders and talk with Elders Percy Henry (personal communication, Mar. 8, 2016) said "Yea. If they listen they will become Elder. If they just follow good pay good money they will be in trouble".

The school as well as the Youth Centre and Cultural Centre have a handful of very enthusiastic Elders that are regularly called upon for their knowledge and expertise. These Elders are also involved in all aspects of the Dawson community. For example, Elder Victor Henry may be the biggest sports fan in Dawson, attending all the events from hockey to baseball, and all ages from the little ones to adults. He is a welcomed fixture at these events and everyone loves his presence. Victor also makes time to play snowshoe baseball with the students at the school during gym and he helps out with the Jigging classes. Recently attending the Jigging trip in Mayo with the Jigging club. Victor said he just watches them and is there to support them. "When they travel they need me, some wouldn't go without me, I am the one that taught them" (V. Henry, personal communication, Feb. 19, 2016). These moments speak volumes to the importance of Elder presence and why having an Elder in residence at the school could

encourage students and improve intergenerational learning. The school has a handful of Elder “regulars” they call upon to help teach traditional knowledge in the school. Just being present and sharing their experiences of learning, as a child is a great way to improve intergenerational relationships and teach the traditional ways of life and how learning took place then, compared to now. An Elder speaks of their experiences in *Our Stories about Teaching and Learning* (2014, p.32-33):

My dad built us a little tiny cutting table, and they’d give us the small little fish, and we would copy them. It was all fun learning. It wasn’t like we had to do it. It’s like “show me”. I heard that all the time. You’d get frustrated and say, “Show me” and “I can do it.” So now when I teach, I sit with the students on the floor and teach them. We sit in a circle, and I sit in the same type of chairs they do, and if we sit on the floor, I sit on the floor with them. I never stood over them, because when you are little, the teacher looks powerful up there. I guess it’s just from my experience. I know that from my school experience at residential school. I think it is better to respect the students and not tower over them.

Teachers in the Robert Service School are on board for integration methods and bringing Elders into the classrooms or the school to help enrich the First Nation integration methods and programs. Teachers believe having elders in the school “brings a cultural component to the classroom and represents FN students, making it more comfortable for them. There is more and more FN content each year, it is much different than years ago” (C. Betts, personal communication, Mar. 1, 2016). “Elders in the classroom help to build relationships with youth. Teachers are very scheduled and bound to curriculum so going with the flow and having elders

popping in could be challenging, but could be very good at the same time” (S. Stephens, personal communication, Mar. 3, 2016). The inclusion of Elders is made possible through the Cultural Education Liaison Coordinators (CELC’s) that are present in the schools in the Yukon organizing cultural inclusion pieces and activities in school, as well as organizing the Elders into school activities and camp activities. The Yukon Government provides funding to the schools to pay the Elders for their time and knowledge. Guest Elders are paid by honoraria, acknowledging and respecting their learned position as teacher as well as recognizing them as honoured guests. A teacher speaks about the interest in local history in *Our Stories about Teaching and Learning* (2014, p. 26):

Lots of effort is placed on what might be of interest to them and identifying what opportunities to learn can come from those areas. One thing that’s working now, especially with my Aboriginal students, is a unit on early history in this area. It’s really an integrated unit focusing on change as a result of the [Klondike Gold Rush] and how that impacted local [Aboriginal] people. The students are most fascinated by the people stories. We actually have few stories, but we have lots of [photographs] and these images create conversations and we write and illustrate stories based upon what we see and read in the history. The stories of new people coming to the goldfields, the hardships they all faced and the impact this had on the First Nations here throughout the territory. Bella (an elder) came in to talk to them about her parents’ experiences and how they were impacted by the Gold Rush- good and bad. These lead into further questions, and the students can relate to it.

Culture camps are offered to students multiple times throughout the school year and seem to be a welcomed traditional learning experience for them. Culture camps provide a great opportunity to bring elders and youth together out on the land where they can experience the land. This is the best way to gain knowledge about the land. Elders of TH feel most comfortable passing down traditional knowledge in this setting. Percy Henry (personal communication, Feb. 8, 2016) spoke briefly with me about his experience with the kids at camp. He says:

First day after supper she (Jody) talks to them and she talk about what we're doing and then she tells the kids that tomorrow morning the Elder will talk to you, so you just listen. They are good that way. Then they go to bed and the next morning they ready to go. When I talk to kids I don't tell them don't do this and I don't tell them what to do. I don't give them everything; you give them little bit here... little bit there... and the kids figure it out.

Extrapolating on these wise words of Elder Percy Henry, Nadasdy (2003) explains that Northern Athapaskan peoples believe that to interfere with another person's autonomy is to hamper that person's efforts to gain true knowledge through experience. It is for this reason that people do not "force themselves" on others by making decisions for them, acting aggressively, or teaching them through direct or formal means. Instead they allow others the freedom to live their lives and thus seek knowledge through experience in their own personal way. Elder Victor Henry (personal communication, Jan. 26, 2016) spoke with me about how he enjoys the culture camps and having that opportunity to spend time with the youth on the land:

You can't learn from a blackboard, and sitting with four walls around you, and artificial light. Go out on land and listen to elders and watch them. You have to be out in the field or you will never learn, no questions just watch. Being outdoors

connects you to the land and when you take kids out of the classroom they have lots to tell you, they learn better.

A community member in *Our Stories about Teaching and Learning* (2014, p. 36-37) spoke of their feelings towards formal schooling and experiences with culture camps growing up, highlighting the different teaching and learning methods and how they present different opportunities and emotions for students:

I felt like the teacher was up here like a judge, and you're down here like you're guilty or something. That's kind of how I felt...It was harder learning that way because you are being told what to do and not being shown really how to do it...For me, and I notice for my peers too, it's easier to learn when the elders are telling me stories, and then we get hands on experience right there. So, for example, with something like "First Fish" we're told stories and then we get to help and learn and there's always someone there to help you. You go through the whole process. Just being told what to do doesn't work for me. I don't have the comprehension. I need to see it. I'm a visual learner. And the assistance and supervision of the elders helps. They work with you and watch with you. If they see you make a mistake they'll come over right away and say, "This is the proper way" or "This works safer this way."

There has been talk throughout the school, the Heritage Department of the TH Government, and the Education Department of the Yukon Government about the possibility of having an Elder lounge or Cultural Education Centre at the Robert Service School in Dawson, to increase the Elder presence and participation in the school with the youth. The Heritage and Education department would love to see an elder lounge or Cultural Education Centre at the

school in the future because it could provide ongoing regular presence of elders in the school and allow for youth and elder interaction on a more personal level as opposed to just coming in and participating in an activity. They will be able to talk to each other and students could go to them for advice or just to talk and spend time with them. This would also allow Elders to be more involved and have relationships with the teachers. Many of the elders mentioned that they would be willing to go to the school for this but that they do get tired quickly, and wouldn't want to go in every day, but a schedule of half days could work well for them.

The Youth Centre is another place available in the community that presents an opportunity to bring together Elders and youth and improve the intergenerational relationships between them. It provides space for intergenerational learning and opportunity to help close the generation gap that is currently increasing. The Elders are welcome to come to the space anytime and work with the kids on how to be the best people they can be. They have after school programs involving Elders and traditional activities such as beading. The youth centre coordinators are actively engaged in the community and are more than happy to have elders drop in to the youth centre to engage with the youth in a meaningful way. They strive to make their space inviting for elders to come in and feel comfortable.

Similar to the Youth Centre, the Tr'inke Zho Headstart pre-school that has been grounding children in their culture from the age of 3 and preparing them for school, is also always welcoming to the presence of Elders in their establishment and always willing to do what they can to encourage Elder relationships with the children of the community. The pre-school is a great place to begin building these intergenerational relationships and establish good communication and mutual respect.

The Heritage Department, along with the Education Department in Dawson have more recently been working towards a recurring theme of “Tr’ohudè”- Living a good life, our way, that they would like to have instilled in the community. Their vision, as J. Beaumont explains, (personal communication, Jan. 18, 2016) is to have this theme run through all education and be a way of life for the future generations.

TH value system forms the foundation for our daily code of conduct. This code, or set of known social expectations and behaviours is called Tr’ohudè in the Hän language. It includes our moral and ethical code, or set of acceptable actions and behaviours, that allow us to live “in a good way” – as our Elders would say. Tr’ohudè must remain flexible and ever changing to ensure that it remains relevant and reflects our present and future realities.

“Elders who are role models demonstrate a willingness to be approached and to share. The behaviour of elders is consistent with the teachings about conduct and attitude (about how to be “right” in the world. Elders model consistency in their respect for, and adherence to cultural traditions” (Crooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000; p.3). To live a good life as a TH citizen, according to Victor Henry (personal communication, Jan.26, 2016) is to live alcohol and drug free, to do work with the youth, and get involved with hunting and traditional activities.

“Teaching children the TH way of a good life is important because if we don’t start teaching them it will be lost”. Many other Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in members discussed their ideas of living a “good life” during personal conversation, and most have ideas very similar to one another:

Abstain from alcohol and drugs. Not carry around negative opinions and be judgmental of people and children. Be a good listener and live a balanced lifestyle. Teach our children to be smart, independent, and happy. For this to

happen we need to know our culture and heritage and be loved by the whole community. It takes a village to raise a child.

(D. Nagano, personal communication, Jan.26, 2016).

Living a good life...a life with traditional skills is important. Young people need to know that they need to learn these skills, how to harvest and survive, get food from the land and do it with respect so it will return to you and you will continue to have it. The time is coming they will need to know this.

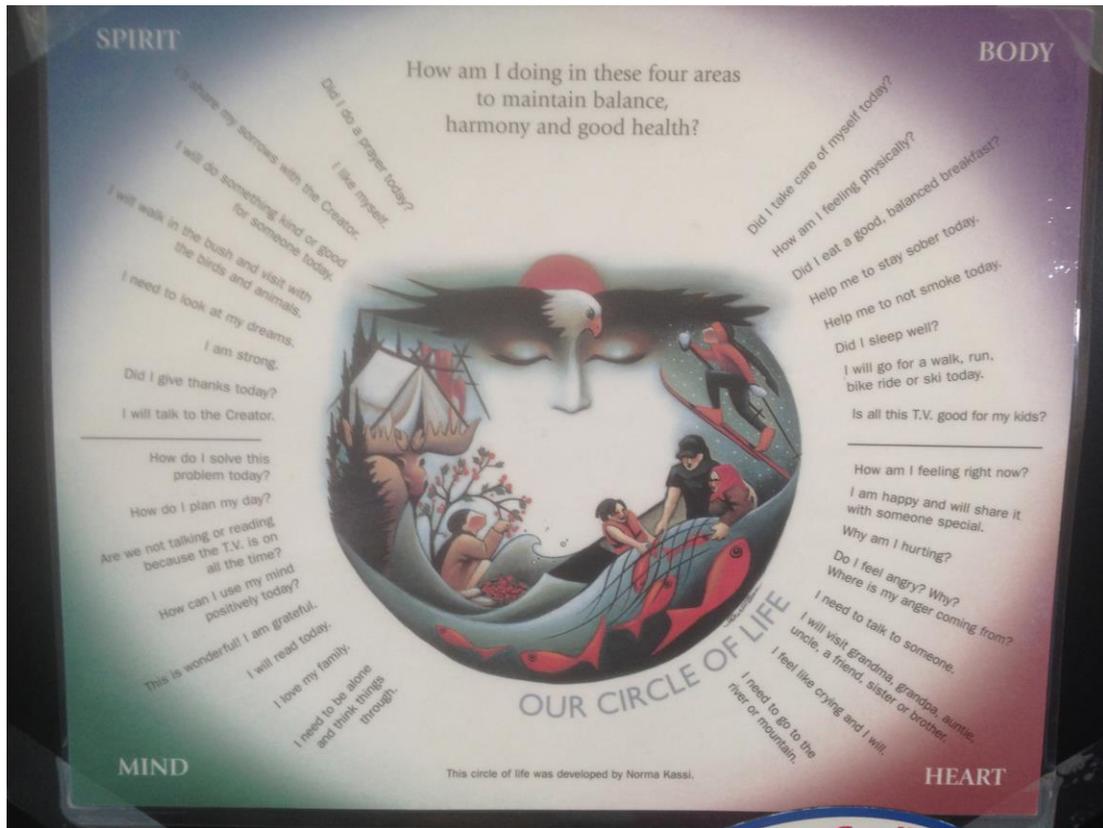
(A. Joseph-Rear, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2016)

This theme is already present in some of the classrooms at Robert Service School and teachers are trying to incorporate it into their everyday classroom culture instilling good morals and practices as well as connecting students with their community and re-connecting First Nations students with their culture and traditional ways of life. C. Betts (personal communication, Mar. 2, 2016) says:

I try to incorporate Tr'ohude everyday in my classroom, teaching the children good choices and how to live in a good way. The kids don't necessarily connect Tr'ohude or even the First Nation circle with their culture because families are so disconnected from it and have lost their culture. Students are disconnected because their parents are disconnected.

The First Nation circle is a piece that reminds people of the values and codes of conduct that can help provide a healthy lifestyle, maintaining balance, harmony, and good health. "Tr'ohudè" is another way of maintaining balance and harmony between the spirit, body, mind, and heart. Elders in the community are role models for the younger generations and living "Tr'ohudè" not only provides them a healthy, happy, lifestyle, it also helps to re-establish pride in Tr'ondëk

Hwëch'in culture and themselves and contributes to the future and revitalization of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture and community.



## Conclusion

When discussing educational reform and the revitalization of Indigenous culture and ways of knowing, it is most important to recognize that “Canadian schools teach a silent curriculum of Eurocentric knowledge by the way teachers behave and the manner in which they transmit information” (Battiste, 2002, p. 30). Effort needs to be made in the area of inclusion of First Nations ways of knowing and doing and to do this holistic and humanistic relationships with the land and community need to be fostered. The incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge

in the school system in Dawson City is a number one priority for the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government as well as the Yukon Government. The SGA's in the Yukon illustrate that this is a mandatory obligation for the school system and efforts are being made by the Heritage department and Education department to integrate as much knowledge as possible for the benefit of First Nations students as well as all students and the community as a whole. "Having elders involved in education is particularly important for the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in community for cultural revitalization, cultural continuity, and the building of future elders. The only way to include First Nation language and culture in the school is to connect with Elders because they are the ones who hold traditional knowledge" (A. Doiron, personal communication, Jan. 14, 2016). Community Elders are what bring Indigenous Knowledge into formal education alongside Euro western theories and practice. As Ball (2004) explains, the success of these intergenerational relationships has been documented as contributing to the increased rate of First Nations Graduates. The educational approach of community based integrated education has proved to improve community development as well as awarding value to Indigenous Knowledge, increased social cohesion in First Nation communities, intergenerational teaching and learning, and community programs that encourage and support First Nations people.

**"We need to teach our children today, so our way of life will live on"**

**"Nitr'inke Hätr'udënätaän Däji'Nihënjëk Honts'ä'tr'ude nihënjëk wëtäde Hänjit"**

**(Percy Henry, 2012; in Dobrowolsky, 2003 p. 122)**

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation Heritage Department along with Education Department have had a vision of creating an Elder Resource Booklet for the community of Dawson City in order to better utilize Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Elders in Educational programing for

the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge. When introduced to my research interests in intergenerational learning it was determined that the research for my major paper would overlap with the information they wanted incorporated into an Elder resource book. Many educational workers are not familiar with the history of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in in Dawson City and are not aware of the hardships faced by this community since European contact. These hardships have an impact on First Nation members today and affect how they involve themselves in the community. In order to integrate Indigenous knowledge with formal educational programming, it is important to involve Elders as they are the holders of traditions, and First Nation knowledge, and can pass this knowledge on to future generations. Many barriers are present that prevent the involvement of Elders with education and the community as a whole and it is important to recognize these barriers, as well as the opportunities in order to properly involve Elders in a sensitive and culturally appropriate way.

Attached as Appendix A is the Elder Resource Booklet for the community of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Dawson City, Yukon produced by myself the primary researcher in collaboration with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage, Education department, and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation.

### **Recommendations**

1. An Elder Resource Booklet for use by the school, teachers, and community members of Dawson City. To better understand the current and past experiences of the community Elders and to better incorporate them into the school system in order to improve the intergenerational learning and the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge for the purpose of integrated education (Currently being produced by, myself the primary researcher, in collaboration with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department and the Yukon Education Department).

2. Profile template in the resource booklet that the Community Education Liaison Coordinator can fill out in cooperation with teachers, including:

- Elder name
- Residing
- Contact number
- Skills
- Picture
- Sample work, recent work

3. Having kits for each activity that the Elders commonly teach at the school. With all the gear needed to teach the topic. Having items for Elders to speak to, speak about, or tell stories about can reduce the pressure of not knowing, or wondering what to talk about with students.

Commonly taught activities that kits could be used for:

- Medicine
- Drums

- Trapping
- Hunting
- Fishing

4. Elder lounge/ cultural support centre at the school could provide a common room or area that Elders and youth can talk and spend time together. Also allows for easy access to Elders if teachers wanted to incorporate an Elder into a lesson.

- Many of the Elders mentioned that they would be willing to go to the school for this but that they get tired quickly, and don't want to go in every day, so a schedule of half days could work well for them.
- Teachers expressed that having a room where Elders 'just are'; to hang out with students would be great.

5. Youth Centre space for Elders

- Need a space more welcoming to Elders like that at Heritage and Education. Such as a little table or chair in the main space with some FN based trinkets on the table that Elders can play with or talk about. Coordinators and Elders can sit there and youth will make their way over.
- Bingo night or card night at the youth centre. Elders could hang out with youth and teach kids traditional games such as stick gambling and Indian Bingo would be great to bring the Elders and youth together.

6. Elder workshops

- Teach our Elders to be teachers and teach younger members how to become Elders.

Teach Elders to know what the school wants from them. Be part of a bigger plan-where are we? Where do we want to be?

7. Have a culture camp in every season for the students

8. Have a chart explaining the traditional activities in each season so teachers can better prepare for the year and the incorporation of Elders in to their lesson plans ahead of time.

- Teachers raised concerns that they are not sure exactly what the protocol is for getting Elders in ... are they able to contact them themselves?

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## **Appendix A**

### **Elder Resource Booklet for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in**

**Krista Dempster**

In collaboration with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department and Yukon Education

Department

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## **Acknowledgments**

In 2008, the Yukon Education Advisory Committee proposed several goals and priorities for education in the Yukon. Central priorities included the development of curriculum and resources that integrate into curricula, First Nations content, perspectives, values, knowledge and ways of teaching and learning. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage department in collaboration with Yukon Education included the priority of increasing elder incorporation in the education system. Elder incorporation in the school system is an important part of integrating traditional first nation knowledge into the mainstream education system, as they are the holders of traditional knowledge and knowledge traditionally was passed down through generations from elder to youth. This incorporation contributes to the maintenance and continuation of intergenerational learning and the resurgence and rehabilitation of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture. Thank you to Janet McDonald with the First Nation Program and Partnerships Centre of the Yukon Government for recognizing the connection between my research and the priorities of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government and Education Department in Dawson City. Thanks to Ashley Doiron of the Yukon Education Department, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage, and Jody Beaumont of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department for collaborating with me on this paper and project. Special thank you to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in citizens for welcoming me into their community and working with me towards a common goal of preserving local culture and intergenerational relationships.

### **Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Vision statement**

Our vision is to achieve an interdependent and united self-governing First Nation by re-establishing our traditional culture and reclaiming our identity and rightful place as Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nations people. By committing to work together to provide training, education, and employment, we will build a strong, healthy, and stable future.

### **Culture and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in values**

Culture can be expressed in many different ways amongst various First Nations. Despite the differences, there are foundational beliefs that are common to First Nations and considered part of “Indigenous worldview”. These beliefs or concepts, as explained by Anishnaabe First Nation Jim Dumont, surround

- The **spirit**, which is housed within an inclusive concept of body-mind-heart-spirit, is always central and always works in relationship to the other levels of being.
- The **circle**, which is primary to all life and life, processes, and is of primary significance in relating to and understanding life itself in all its dimensions and diversity and influences how the world is viewed. Seeing in a circular manner is seeing the interconnectedness and interdependence within all life.
- **Harmony** that believes all life cares for one another, strives to achieve and maintain an interrelationship that assures quality of life for the collective whole
- **Balance** that presumes a disposition toward balance causes people to see the dynamic character of the real world strives to maintain equilibrium in all aspects of the total economy of its ecology.

- All things regarded as “**persons**” and “relatives” that have a range of qualities, that in western ideology would be exclusive to human persons. One is responsible for maintaining harmonious relationships with all “persons”.
- **Respect and honour** the interconnectedness of all life, which is a relationship that is reciprocal.
- The human person is **of the earth** and from the earth, which herself is a living breathing, conscious being, and is part of the balance of nature.

Culture is the spiritual, mental, social, and physical practice of this worldview.

The Yukon First Nations have their own set of core values important to defining their culture and recognizing what is good or not good, providing guidance and structure.

- Respect- core of all aspects of life and should be reflected in thoughts, words, and actions
- Selflessness-to live life unselfishly and be focused on the betterment of others and whole community
- Sharing- wealth shared among the collective, as an essential aspect to survival and the advancement of the people, their culture, and their ways
- Stewardship- being a steward of the land and all its resources relevant to the culture, land, animals, language, heritage
- Honour- requiring honesty, fairness, and integrity in our beliefs and actions
- Integrity- strong and steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code embedded into our world views and traditional laws

- Honesty- to think, speak, and act with truthfulness, sincerity, and frankness but with respect
- Balance and harmony- we are comprised of four main functions which cover physical being, spiritual being, emotional being, and mental being. Balance considers all these elements in the way we live, and harmony is the way things all interconnect and work together in unity
- Knowledge- recognition that individuals will continually be gaining knowledge throughout their lifetime, and as knowledge keepers will pass on what they have learned from the generations before them to the generations to come after them
- Unity and cooperation- to work in cooperation and unity with one another in order to survive and allow for the development and growth of FN ways of life

(Traditional Knowledge Research Guidelines, 2000)

### **Historic impacts on the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in**

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, were impacted tremendously by historical events that they could not control. These events were the cause of the slow, unregulated altering of their society, with their traditions, morals, and behaviours changing over time; known as cultural drift.

- **Fur trade**- 1847- First recorded encounter of the Han with the Hudson's Bay Company Traders. The sale of Alaska to the United States opened up many more trading posts on Han territory. With this came many new items for the Han. Han were now connected to the world economy that they could not control (Mishler, 2004)

- **Missionaries**-1850s- protestant missionaries encountered by Han sought to deliberately and fundamentally change Han culture. Teaching them Christian ways at mission schools and forcing them to turn away from their own culture (Mishler, 2004)
- **Disease**- 1900s-smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria  
Trade networks and the influx of people from the gold rush acted as conduits for contagious infectious disease that the Han were not accustomed to. Disease killed the young, the old, and entire families. The loss of elders disrupted the transmission of cultural knowledge and language to younger generations (Mishler, 2004)
- **Gold rush**-1886 bringing new people to Han territory. 1896 with the discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek began a defining event in Han history, the Klondike Stampede, forever changing the economy and society of the Han people. Prospectors overran the area and displaced the Han from Tr'ochek to Moosehide while Dawson City took shape; home to 20,000-30,000 people at the height of the stampede. The Han now a minority had to compete for vital resources as they lost hunting and fishing grounds and non-natives were over hunting game. Living in a new society the Han were introduced to the frontier lifestyle of the love for gambling, alcohol, vile language, and the degradation of women (Mishler, 2004).
- **Relocation**-1897, Dawson city established ...Han at Tr'ochek are relocated by missionaries three miles down river to Moosehide which brought about a completely different way of life for the Han as they were no longer moving around with the changing seasons. This also gave the government the opportunity to begin the assimilation process.

- **Residential schools-** Mission school at Moosehide closed causing an exodus of families to Dawson. Missionaries believed that removing children from their backward environment would allow them to better become useful members of society. Boarding schools were introduced where missionaries could control what children learned. The Carcross residential school opened in 1911 by the Anglican Church where children were taught to despise their culture and were not allowed to speak their native language. As a result, children returning from residential school did not fit in to their native or non-native society (Mishler, 2004).

These events occurring over the short time of 100 years, transformed the economy, society, and culture of the Han people and left them with the residue of disease, dependency, and alcoholism (Mishler, 2004). With the ongoing threat to their culture and traditional ways of life, the Han Chief of the time arranged for the Gan Haak, songs, dances and stories to be trusted to the Han people of Eagle Alaska until a time when they had found their power and could once again share them with pride.

“Beat of the Drum- Raven, you must fly away with our songs, dances, stories, and drums and store them where they can be protected until there comes a time when we can share them with pride and honesty... a time when we have found our power.”

(Dobrowolsky, 2003)

A century later, the battle to save Tr'ochek was part of a larger struggle by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to regain control of their lives and become a self-governing First Nation

(Dobrowolsky, 2003).

## **Together Today for our Children Tomorrow**

In the Yukon Territory there are 14 different First Nations. In Dawson City one is always on the territory of Han or Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, formerly the Dawson City Indian Band. The education reform in the Yukon began with the Yukon Brotherhood document "Together Today, for our Children Tomorrow" which was an important document in the Yukon First Nations becoming Self Governing (Bennett, personal communication, February 26, 2015). This important document discussing First Nations wants and needs in regards to things such as cultural identity, community development, education, economic development, research, and a policy statement for the 'Education of Yukon Indians' was delivered to Ottawa in 1973 by the Yukon Chiefs (Johnston, personal communication, March 3, 2015; Yukon Indian People, 1973). The Education piece of this document was important in order to work towards bringing back a set of First Nations cultural values that would help the young people understand who they are, and regain their lost pride (Yukon Indian People, 1973). The Yukon Indian People (1973) discuss that the educational system for 'Indians' was designed to assimilate them to become white men through cultural replacement. For 'Indian' education to be successful, they believed the best thing was to attend public schools in order to develop the skills required to be successful in today's world, however, they wanted programs for "the special problems, the preservation of language, and the factual representation of the culture of a group comprising nearly one-third of the Yukon's population" (Yukon Indian People, 1973, p.50).

Over the past thirty years the governments of Canada and the Yukon have moved towards developing policies with the Yukon's 12 First Nation groups, called Self-Government Agreements (SGAs), which are unique to the Yukon and "include financial compensation, land, harvesting rights, heritage resources, and operative government structures in areas such as

education and justice” (Lewthwaite, Owen, and Doiron, 2015). The Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation established their SGA in 1998 and it has brought about significant change in education providing opportunity for education practices that are responsive to the cultural needs of the First Nation. Specific reference to education is made in section 17.7 of the SGA:

In relation to education, upon the request of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in and the Yukon shall during the term of a self-government financial transfer agreement, negotiate the division and sharing of responsibility for the design, delivery, and administration of programs delivered within the Traditional Territory relating to [amongst other things] kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum.

(Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, 1998, p.33)

Although the SGA allows for a self-contained First Nation education system in Dawson, the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in see themselves as part of an integrated community and feel they should have an integrated education system as well. In Dawson, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in and the Yukon Government co-manage the “culture based education which requires activities to create, preserve, promote and enhance TH culture, including arts, heritage, and language” (Lewthwaite & Doiron, 2014, p.65).

### **Culturally Inclusive Education** (Borrowed from Yukon School Resource, FNPP)

The importance of building relationships that involve the parents, families and communities of your students in their education cannot be emphasized enough. These connections are necessary for the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual success and well being of First Nations students.

Incorporating local knowledge and traditional teachings into your students' education on a regular basis provides both you and your students with opportunities to learn through hands-on experiences.

#### STRATEGIES TO CONNECT WITH STUDENTS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY:

- Take time to learn about Yukon First Nations governments and their traditional knowledge processes by talking to elders, traditional teachers and resource people. Books, documents and the Internet can also be used as a secondary form of research.
- Learn about your community by talking with local First Nations people.
- The simplest way to contact local people to share their knowledge is to work through the CELCs. The coordinators knowledge of the local community will enable them to set up the arrangements.
- Many First Nations people speak more slowly and use conversational pauses that are longer than those who communicate entirely in English. Also, First Nations people often take their time to fully consider and respond to a question before answering. It is therefore important to provide adequate time for people to respond when asking questions.
- Participate in professional development opportunities sponsored by the local First Nation, for example: community orientation, adult language classes, cultural camps and other initiatives. Visit the staff at the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage department to find out what is available.
- Learn some of the Han First Nation language spoken in your community. Contact Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department for information on classes. For online language lessons, check the YNLC website at [www.ynlc.ca](http://www.ynlc.ca).
- Use instructional strategies that are based on your students' cultural and environmental

experiences. Include the four domains—mental, physical, spiritual and emotional—when developing lessons.

- Land is integral to Yukon First Nations traditions. It is a source of food, clothing, shelter and spirituality. Provide a supportive environment for parent participation in all aspects of their children’s education, including subsistence activities on the land.

### **Intergenerational learning and the role of Elders in education**

Schools are institutions where intergenerational learning takes place. Our education system, however, focuses on bringing youth together in masses to learn from adults who tell them what they should learn. Loewen (1996) says that the school opportunities for intergenerational learning should be about bringing both the young and old together for opportunities for each to learn from one another. He compares industrialized society to that of non-industrial society and explains that elder knowledge in a non-industrial society is valued greatly due to the fact that the knowledge elders possess about their land and survival has much in common with younger generations lives. In industrialized society, rapid technological advances make elder knowledge more and more irrelevant to the younger generations lives, and contributes to widening the generation gap. When it comes to First Nations communities, the knowledge held by elders and the transmission of that knowledge is how their culture remains strong throughout the years. Ernest Boyer (cited in Loewen, 1996) states, “The health of any culture depends on the vital interactions among at least three generations”.

Learning in a formal education school model is much different than learning outside of school. While in school, students are judged individually on tasks that are set out by the institution or teacher; these tasks often do not reflect the real world that many students live in.

Without incorporation of adults that reflect this 'real world' "we may continue preparing students for a world that is nothing like the one they face upon graduation" (Loewen, 1996; p.24). By bringing together multiple generations to learn from one another, experiences can be shared that illustrate the 'real world' past and present.

#### WHAT INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING CAN DO FOR ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT (Loewen, 1996; p. 37-38)

##### IDENTITY, ADULT ROLE, EXPLORATION:

- What social institutions present for adolescent involvement will be part of their identity, integrated into development
- Guided exposure to adulthood
- Observe actions and habits of real adults
- Observe models of adults worthy of emulation
- The more diversity of models the more possibilities, connections, potential available for adolescent
- Diversity of models grounded in common values of care for adolescent development = community support for development
- Support and interdependence is constantly observable

##### RELATIONSHIPS, RESILIENCY:

- Brings relevance to any study
- Mutual respect strengthens relationship (uncommon between adult and adolescent)
- Equal teaching and learning responsibilities become possible
- Develops "friendship skills"

- Adaptive and integrative skills learned and developed through observation and experience
- Strengthens self concept as more varied and numerous social interactions
- Empathizing spurs intellectual growth and visa versa
- Socially shared experiences with adults

COMPETENCY:

- Talents identified and acknowledgments by adults
- Competencies established beyond transient and superficial demands of adolescent peer pressure
- Guided journey from novice to master by way of bench marks and rites of passage
- Feedback and recognition offered in life stage just when it is needed (the 'need' to feel good at something)
- Opportunity to demonstrate relevant skills and be recognized by adults in the real world

AUTONOMY AND INTERDEPENDENCE:

- Presents more realistic image of the way people work together
- Shared social systems used to accomplish goals
- Success dependent on the meshing of mental and physical efforts of individuals
- Interdependence and reliance on others demonstrated and experienced
- Presents many observable models of "autonomous and interdependent adults "

The education system in Canada has access to “living educational treasures” (Battiste, 2002; p.21) through elders and First Nation members who are proficient in Indigenous knowledge and language. First Nation Elders with their traditions and experiences are pertinent vehicles for the transmission of knowledge along with themes of First Nation worldview and identity (Crooke-

Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000). These treasures are important resources for education and the progress and happiness of First Nation students as well as the revitalization of First Nation culture because elder teachings are “culturally relevant and meaningful to the lives of First Nations students and communities...they value student life experience and provide meaningful education” (Crooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000; p.5).

Having elders in a classroom also rebuilds the connection between generations that many people feel is lost. Elders also benefit from being involved in education. Jordan Lewis (2015) explains that it instills a “sense of pride and purpose among Elders, as well as a heightened awareness of traditional knowledge and Elders’ roles in education”.

Traditionally in Yukon Athapaskan culture, a young girl’s maternal aunt and young boy’s maternal uncle would be responsible for educating them alongside grandparents who also acted as teachers and authority figures. Children learned through observation and experimentation, which was perpetuated by the child’s curiosity. Stories and songs played an important role in learning and also provided the basis for discipline, and knowledge (Council For Yukon Indians, 1987).

Storytelling and dancing are important forms of learning and passing down of knowledge within FN communities. Learning relied on the memories and stories of ancestors and oral tradition was the form of transmission of this knowledge from generation to generation. It provides opportunity to impart wisdom from person to person, and generation to generation. All cultures thrive from communication and an understanding of the past.

“Shëhondëk”- Tell me a story

Stories may be for and about teaching, entertainment, praying, personal expression, history and power. They are to be listened to, remembered,

thought about, and mediated on. Stories are not frivolous or meaningless, a story is not told without intent or purpose. A person's word is bound up closely with the story that he or she tells. A person's word belongs to that person, and in some instances can be viewed as being that person, so words- in particular some words in some context- are not carelessly spoken. These are the old ways, and they are still practiced and observed today by many people in many places

(Cora Weber Pillwax, cited in Battiste, 2002 p.25).

Percy Henry of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in FN in Dawson City (personal communication, Feb. 8, 2016) explained a bit about him telling stories at the school and culture camps, "I don't read book to tell story, I did it myself so I know what I'm talking about".

Some of the stories I tell may be hundred year old, but it passed on to Elder, so he heard it when he was kid. And he told it when he got old, so that kid heard. When he got old he pass it on. So that is how the Indian story go. The Indian story is something never been written on a paper or nothing. It's just a memory.

(Percy Henry, 1994, retrieved in 2016 from a Poster in the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Cultural Centre)

Years ago, the exchange of story between generations was different than it is today. Elder roles have changed more recently with a money-centered economy. Youth used to spend time with elders and help them with chores in exchange for stories (J. Beaumont, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2016).

Learning through watching, storytelling, and experience was the form of traditional education for First Nations. Percy Henry talked about learning to trap with his dad; “He didn’t really show me how to set trap, I watched him, so I learn” (Percy Henry, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2016). Being outside and experiencing the land is the best way you can learn about the land. When asked how he gained knowledge about the land he said “I did it, I seen it, I walked it!” (P.Henry, personal communication, Mar. 8, 2016).

Elder Angie Joseph-Rear (personal communication, Feb. 4, 2016) talks about growing up at the traditional land of Moosehide, located up the river from Dawson City

We spent time with elders, helped them collect water and cut wood, we learned to respect them and they would tell us stories and give us treats and bannock. We learned how to do a lot from going out on the land with elders and mimicking them. Everything was taught by parents or elders in the village... Today is so different, with this quickly evolving world families need to be involved and encouraging their youth to attend camps and traditional activities. We always encourage young people and we ask parents to come too, but they never do

Traditions survive in oral or written form when they are passed down from one generation to another, and onwards through history (Wayne Horowitz, Myth and Medium Pamphlet, 2016).

Through their wisdom and years of lifelong experience, the Elders are the main source of oral history and stories, and they provide knowledge and an identity for FN communities in a relevant way while contributing lessons about life and living traditionally (Maina, 1997).

**We need to teach our children today, so our way of life will live on**

**“Nitr’inke Hätr’udënätaän Däji’Nihënjëk Honts’ä’t’r’ude nihënjëk wëtäde Hänjit”**

**(Percy Henry, 2012; in Dobrowolsky, ... p. 122)**

### **Tr’ohudè- Living a good life**

The Heritage Department, along with the Education Department in Dawson have more recently been working towards a recurring theme of “Tr’ohudè”- Living a good life, our way, that they would like to have instilled in the community. Their vision is to have this theme run through all education and be a way of life for the future generations.

TH value system forms the foundation for our daily code of conduct. This code, or set of known social expectations and behaviours is called Tr’ohudè in the Hän language. It includes our moral and ethical code, or set of acceptable actions and behaviours, that allow us to live “in a good way” – as our Elders would say. Tr’ohudè must remain flexible and ever changing to ensure that it remains relevant and reflects our present and future realities.

(J. Beaumont, personal communication, Jan. 18, 2016)

“Elders who are role models demonstrate a willingness to be approached and to share. The behaviour of elders is consistent with the teachings about conduct and attitude (about how to be “right” in the world. Elders model consistency in their respect for, and adherence to cultural traditions” (Crooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000; p.3). To live a good life as a TH citizen, according to Victor Henry (personal communication, Jan.26, 2016) is to live alcohol and drug free, to do work with the youth, and get involved with hunting and traditional activities.

“Teaching children the TH way of a good life is important because if we don’t start teaching them it will be lost”. Many other Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in members discussed their ideas of living a “good life” during personal conversation, and most have ideas very similar to one another... to

Abstain from alcohol and drugs. Not carry around negative opinions and be judgmental of people and children. Be a good listener and live a balanced lifestyle. Teach our children to be smart, independent, and happy. For this to happen we need to know our culture and heritage and be loved by the whole community. It takes a village to raise a child.

(D. Nagano, personal communication, Jan.26, 2016).

Living a good life... a life with traditional skills is important. Young people need to know that they need to learn these skills, how to harvest and survive, get food from the land and do it with respect so it will return to you and you will continue to have it. The time is coming they will need to know this.

(A. Joseph-Rear, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2016)

This theme is already present in some of the classrooms at Robert Service School and teachers are trying to incorporate it into their everyday classroom culture instilling good morals and practices as well as connecting students with their community and re connecting First Nations students with their culture and traditional ways of life.

I try to incorporate Tr’ohudè everyday in my classroom, teaching the children good choices and how to live in a good way. The kids don’t necessarily connect Tr’ohudè or even the First Nation circle with their

culture because families are so disconnected from it and have lost their culture. Students are disconnected because their parents are disconnected.

(C. Betts, personal communication, Mar. 2, 2016)

The First Nation circle is a piece that reminds people of the values and codes of conduct that can help provide a healthy lifestyle, maintaining balance, harmony, and good health. “Tr’ohudè” is another way of maintaining balance and harmony between the spirit, body, mind, and heart. Elders in the community are role models for the younger generations and living “Tr’ohudè” not only provides them a healthy, happy, lifestyle, it also helps to re-establish pride in Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in culture and themselves and contributes to the future and revitalization of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in culture and community.

### **What is an Elder in the TH community?**

Age (government definition)- 55-60 years old you get 200\$ per month- societal dictation of what an elder is (A. Doiron, personal communication, 2016).

An “Elder” in the TH community: (accumulated through personal conversation with community members, 2016)

- Holds traditional knowledge and willing to share it freely
- Wise
- Has connections to others in community and land
- Wise people
- Life experience that they have learned from and are willing to admit and share
- Knowledge in culture
- Have respect for others and the land

How to become an Elder in the TH community:

- Live life with the traditions of TH culture
- Work with youth/volunteer
- Work with elders and learn from them
- Respect all things
- Know what you should and shouldn't do
- Be someone others can look up to
- Wisdom
- Be spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally involved with TH community
- Guided by past elders
- Thinking of the future with positivity

### **Preparing students for Elders**

A lot of preparation for interacting with elders is instilled in the TH Headstart program at Tr'inke Zho Pre School (D. Scheffen, 2016; K. Nagano, personal communication, 2016).

Teachers prepare their students by discussing with them the importance of Elders within the community and discuss with them to sit close and listen and how to be respectful. The TH community is really close and discusses Elder respect throughout children's lives. The message is always being conveyed in all aspects of their lives.

### **Preparing teachers for Elders**

The Heritage department and Education department want teachers to have cultural awareness and build relationships with Elders they want to bring in to their classrooms (Doiron & Beaumont, personal communication, 2016).

People for a long time didn't have a role as an elder, so it's taking some time to take on that role. People are still working out what the role of an elder is. It could involve influences from the Residential School period or demographic changes in the community. They probably lived a pretty poor lifestyle before. They could have had issues in their own families that have impacted how they are today. All those things could be factors. So it is important to acknowledge those things. If you have that background information and are approaching these elders to want them to talk about something, you do have to work towards building a relationship with them, and making them feel comfortable and relaxed. It definitely has to be a relaxed atmosphere.

So when they are here [at the school], you try to take the time to spend time with them, even though your day could be busy and you have lots of things to do, and you have deadlines and you are thinking about things at home, or whatever. I think it's important to have that relationship with elders and making the time to spend with them. And I think it makes them feel more comfortable with you. I don't know if it is considered a teaching style or not

(Heritage Worker, Our Stories about Teaching and Learning, 2014, p.34-35)

### **Working with Elders: A checklist(borrowed from the First Nations Programs and Partnership Centre)**

When an Elder, or anybody else, speaks to your students it is important to follow community protocol. Contact your CELCs and ESWs, the First Nations Studies teacher or the First Nations language teacher to get community protocol. In most communities it would be appropriate to respect Elders and knowledgeable people in the following ways:

- contact the Elder you wish to invite to your classroom in person;
- allow the Elder some time to think about the offer, do not expect an answer immediately;
- if the Elder agrees, arrange a time to meet in person to explain what the topic is, and work with the Elder to find out what they want to teach and develop the plan together;
- help your students generate questions pertaining to the topic ahead of time for the Elder;
- call the Elder the day before to confirm;
- arrange for a helper;
- make sure there is transportation for the Elder;
- open up the environment so the Elder can move freely;
- put desks and chairs in a circle with the Elder in a comfortable chair;
- help your students greet the Elder respectfully;
- have students greet the Elder in his or her language;
- help the Elder to sit comfortably;
- offer tea and refreshments;
- listen respectfully;
- be relaxed;
- wait for the Elder to speak;
- don't ask about topics that are considered sacred or sensitive;

- check about appropriateness of eye contact in your community;
- arrange for honoraria to be ready when the Elder or other community members come to work with your students (the honoraria is available through Cultural Inclusion funds);
- consider ways to present all traditional stories, songs and dances in the most dynamic way possible;
- meet the Elder in an environment outside the classroom, such as cultural camps, local cultural centres, the local community hall or homes;
- present the Elder with a gift as a thank you: for example a card made by the students, food items or a small handmade gift.

### **Preparing Elders for the school and youth**

“Listen to youth, respect their knowledge, they can teach us too. Show youth how we lived. We need to open our arms to the youth and teach them, so our culture and heritage wont be lost. The youth are the grassroots of our future government. It’s up to us if we want to keep our culture, our heritage, our language going, so we must teach them” (Percy Henry, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, 2012 in *Traditioanl Knowledge Research Guidelines*, 2000)

**Come together today for our children tomorrow**

**Mahsi Cho**

## **Appendix**

### **Recommendations**

1. An Elder Resource Booklet for use by the school, teachers, and community members of Dawson City. To better understand the current and past experiences of the community elders and to better incorporate them into the school system in order to improve the intergenerational learning and the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge for the purpose of integrated education (Currently being produced by, myself the primary researcher, in collaboration with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department and the Yukon Education Department).

2. Profile template in the resource booklet that the Community Education Liaison Coordinator can fill out in cooperation with teachers, including:

- Elder name
- Picture
- Residing in
- Contact number
- Skills
- Sample work, recent work

3. Having kits for each activity that the elders commonly teach at the school. With all the gear needed to teach the topic. Having items for elders to speak to, speak about, or tell stories about can reduce the pressure of not knowing, or wondering what to talk about with students.

Commonly taught activities that kits could be used for:

- Medicine

- Drums
- Trapping
- Hunting
- Fishing

4. Elder lounge/ cultural support centre at the school could provide a common room or area that elders and youth can talk and spend time together. Also allows for easy access to elders if teachers wanted to incorporate an elder into a lesson.

- Many of the elders mentioned that they would be willing to go to the school for this but that they get tired quickly, and don't want to go in every day, so a schedule of half days could work well for them.
- Teachers expressed that having a room where elders 'just are'; to hang out with students would be great.

5. Youth Centre space for elders

- Need a space more welcoming to elders like that at Heritage and Education. Such as a little table or chair in the main space with some FN based trinkets on the table that elder can play with or talk about. Coordinators and elders can sit there and youth will make their way over.
- Bingo night or card night at the youth centre. Elders could hang out with youth and teach kids traditional games such as stick gambling and Indian Bingo would be great to bring the elders and youth together.

## 6. Elder workshops

- Teach our elders to be teachers and teach younger members how to become elders. Teach elders to know what the school wants from them. Be part of a bigger plan-where are we? Where do we want to be?

## 7. Have a culture camp in every season for the students

8. Have a chart explaining the traditional activities in each season so teachers can better prepare for the year and the incorporation of elders in to their lesson plans ahead of time.

- Teachers raised concern that they are not sure exactly what the protocol is for getting elders in ... are they able to contact them themselves?

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